



Malta House of Care Clinic

Greater Hartford

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Five Extraordinary Connecticut Women to be Honored at Malta's Celebrating Wonder Women '23 Event

*Tracy Brennan, M.D., Mellissa Craig, Sandra Cruz-Serrano, Sister Beth Fischer, and Sarah Leathers
to be Honored as Malta House of Care's Wonder Women Class of 2023 on May 3, 2023 at The
Bushnell*

[Hartford, CT] — [March 28, 2023] – Malta House of Care is proud to announce its 11th class of Wonder Women: **Tracy Brennan, M.D., Mellissa Craig, Sandra Cruz-Serrano, Sister Beth Fischer, Sarah Leathers**. These five extraordinary Connecticut women will be honored at **Celebrating Wonder Women 2023** on Wednesday, May 3, 2023 from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm at The Bushnell in Hartford. The evening's host is Jocelyn Maminta, Malta Wonder Woman Class of 2013, former CT News Anchor/Report, and Co-Founder of Caroline's Room.

Since 2011, Malta House of Care has hosted the "Celebrating Wonder Women" awards ceremony and fundraiser for two reasons: to honor extraordinary Connecticut women who are

improving their communities in extraordinary ways, and to support the Malta House of Care, which provides free primary health care to uninsured adults in Greater Hartford. This year's class joins an exclusive group of 76 local women who have received this special honor since the organization's first class in 2011.

This year's extraordinary Wonder Women include a medical doctor and champion of women's health and prevention of intimate partner violence, a teaching artist advocating for social change through performance, a leader who provides food as medicine for families in crisis, a nun leading efforts at a university by example to inspire the next generation of changemakers, and a warrior for underserved children on their academic journey. The impact of these five women is far-reaching with deep impacts across our community today and in the future.

Dr. Tracy Brennan is a champion of women's health who seeks ways to support and empower women as an advocate and changemaker. A dedicated obstetrician and gynecologist for over 35 years and regularly recognized as one of the best doctors in Connecticut, Dr. Brennan helped establish a statewide universal screening program for Intimate Partner Violence through the Health Professional Outreach Program at the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV). She has also helped families through her work with A Better World Adoption Agency and by establishing a diaper bank at the Malta Food Pantry. She joined the Board of Directors for Malta House of Care in 2017 and has volunteered at Malta as a direct provider of care or as interim medical director for many years. She has volunteered at the Malta Food Pantry since its inception in 2012. Dr. Brennan is known for her compassion, her willingness to volunteer for multiple causes, and her collaborative attitude. In the words of CCADV's Director, Ashley Starr Frechette, "Her passion and commitment to women's health and safety is beyond words. She is truly the best." A resident of West Hartford and recent retiree, Dr. Brennan is again serving in a volunteer capacity as the Interim Medical Director at Malta House of Care. "Serving women as an OB/GYN has been a joy and a privilege. Now that I am retired and volunteering at the Malta House of Care, I experience that same joy caring for the uninsured in Hartford," states Dr.

Brennan.

Mellissa Craig is an artist, educator, and activist. A native of Hartford and graduate of Trinity College, Ms. Craig is an accomplished dancer in Modern, African, and Caribbean folk forms and is a trained Stilt walker. Ms. Craig is an ensemble member with the Justice Dance Performance Project (JDPP), performing in several major productions that call for social change and give voice, visibility, and justice to the stories of the unheard. She is currently co-curating and performing in the virtual series, *A Response and A Call*, a work that speaks directly to issues of race and identity in America to create a dialogue and cultivate hope around solutions. For the past 11 years, Ms. Craig has been teaching dance and theater for CREC's Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School – Full Day and Half Day programs. She is a dancer, choreographer, and puppeteer for several Hartford-based performing companies including FriendZWorldMusic, Island Reflections Dance Theatre, and Night Fall. Her mother, Charmaine Craig, was part of Malta's Wonder Women Class of 2015, making Mellissa and her mother the first mother-daughter pair to hold this special honor. Mellissa's personal philosophy resonates in all the work she does: "I am dedicated to using the arts to leave the world a brighter and more enlightened place to live than I found it."

Sandra Cruz-Serrano works tirelessly as an advocate for children and families to help ensure disadvantaged children have the opportunities, support, and resources needed to succeed academically. Driven by personal experience, her life's work is energized by a passion to make a lasting change for the next generation by aiding impoverished children and children of color today. Cruz-Serrano currently serves as the Deputy Executive Director of Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) in Hartford where her problem-solving skills and extensive experience in education have allowed her to implement a school desegregation initiative and create efficiencies to provide higher-quality service while developing strong partnerships with local and state agencies and officials. In her words, "I strive to make a difference in people's lives every single day, the work we do at CREC, literally changes lives."

Sister Beth Fischer has dedicated her career to helping underserved populations in Greater Hartford. Through her hands-on service, leadership, and advocacy, Sister Beth truly brings to life the mission of the Sisters of Mercy as she lives out her vow to help the poor, the sick, and the uneducated. She leads by compassionate example and is a volunteer at Hands on Hartford, the Wellness Center, Mercy Housing and Shelter, Malta House of Care, and St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Guyana and also facilitates community service opportunities for students as the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs/Community Engagement at the University of St. Joseph in West Hartford. She offers a quote from Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, that sums up her ministry beautifully: “There are three things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost the donor nothing. Among these are the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.”

Sarah Leathers discovered the healing power of food through her own health crisis and has passionately championed bringing the food is medicine approach to CT. She is an inspirational woman who took a vision to heal others using food and made it a reality. She is the Founder & CEO of the Healing Meals Community Project, a non-profit based in Simsbury with a mission to provide healthy, organic meals to people in a health crisis while fostering compassion and empowering youth and adult volunteers in our communities. Started in 2016, Healing Meals is an affiliate of Ceres Community Project, a non-profit started by Sarah’s sister Cathryn in 2006. Thanks to the creativity, enthusiasm, leadership and vision of this Wonder Woman, Healing Meals has prepared and delivered over 115,000 meals served to 1400 clients in over 85 towns with the help of over 50,000 volunteer hours. In the words of colleague Karen Carew, “Sarah is more than deserving of this Wonder Woman award. Her passion for “food is medicine,” her wonderful leadership skills, and her vision for making healthy food available to all those in need is truly amazing and exemplary.” Leathers states, “I find my greatest joy in helping to make someone’s day better... I am grateful to know we are making an important difference in the lives

of so many people who need to feel nourished and loved and being able to provide these services fills my own heart with nourishment.”

Find more about Celebrating Wonder Women Online:

Website: <http://maltahouseofcare.org/ww23>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MaltaHouseFdn>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MaltaHouseofCare/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@maltahouseofcare>

Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/malta-house-of-care-inc/>

About Malta House of Care

The Malta House of Care medical clinic provides high-quality, *free* primary health care to uninsured adults in Greater Hartford, always with compassion and respect. Malta has had over 73,000 patient visits since it first opened its doors as a mobile medical clinic helping the community with its specialized 40-foot van traveling to neighborhoods in Greater Hartford. In 2022, Malta opened a new state-of-the-art stationary medical clinic in the Asylum Hill neighborhood in Hartford. This incredible feat has allowed Malta the opportunity to increase its reach to more neighborhoods by having the mobile van available to visit more locations. Malta relies 100% on revenues generated by philanthropy. The good work of Malta is made possible by our amazing staff and an incredible corps of volunteer doctors, nurses, and other medical

professionals who contribute about 1,000 hours of free medical care each year, as well as thousands of generous financial supporters. Malta provides no cost primary care for over 1,800 uninsured adults, approximately 90% of whom have one or more chronic diseases.

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