



Gail Donner, far right, and Mary Wheeler, third from right, pose for a picture at the 2018 Registered Nurses' Foundation of Ontario gala. The pair launched the Nurse Innovator Award and in 2019 handed out the first two prizes, totalling \$30,000 and raised through donations.

Two nurses launch award to fund innovation in their field

PAUL WALDIE

PITCHING IN

The organizers: Mary Wheeler and Gail Donner

The pitch: Raising \$450,000

The cause: To fund awards for nursing innovation

When Mary Wheeler was asked to join a group of women who wanted to raise money for various causes, she decided to focus on her long-time passion: nursing.

Ms. Wheeler has had a lengthy career in nursing and she's an honorary life member of the Registered Nurses' Foundation of Ontario. She and Gail Donner, who is also a life member of the RNFO, run a coaching and mentorship business that specializes in health care.

The two women decided to launch a Nurse Innovator Award at the foundation to support new ideas in the profession.

"Nurses have lots of great ideas, but if you can't support them financially, where do they go for money?" Ms. Wheeler said from her home in Brampton, Ont.

They approached other life members of the foundation and asked them to commit \$2,500 each to fund the award for five years. The response was overwhelming and they raised nearly \$450,000 from 125 nurses and nine friends and supporters.

The foundation handed out the first two awards in 2019, totalling \$30,000. Last year, there were three winners who shared \$63,000, and this year the organizers plan to increase the overall amount to \$85,000 with a special emphasis on innovations related to the pandemic. There will also be a Nurse Entrepreneur Award.

The winners so far have ranged from an innovative podcast called *At The Bedside* to new techniques for treating wounds and improving health care at home for vulnerable children.

Ms. Wheeler credits the contribution of her fellow nurses for making the award such a success. "It's that old adage about being clear on your vision, surrounding yourself with the best people and just keeping at it," she said. "And to see the benefit of how nurses with great ideas, when they need some funding, they now know that here's a place to go to get it."

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