

## **Employee of the Year Nominee Profile**

### **Mary Ellen Helton – Cafeteria, Dietary Department Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority**

At Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority, some of our most impactful caregivers wear aprons instead of scrubs. They serve healing not only through care plans, but through kindness, presence, and a warm plate of food. Mary Ellen Helton is one of those caregivers; A quiet but steady force who shows up every day with purpose, positivity, and an unwavering commitment to serving others. Her work in the CIHA cafeteria nourishes bodies and lifts spirits, making her a shining example of our values and a worthy nominee for Employee of the Year.

#### **Integrity**

Mary Ellen leads by doing. She is the very definition of *“the one who helps you from the heart.”* Whether she’s staying late to cover a shift or stepping in to support a teammate without being asked, she holds herself accountable and does it all with grace. Her honesty, dependability, and kindness are the cornerstones of her daily work.

She treats every meal served as an opportunity to show care. Her cheerful demeanor, genuine interest in others, and professional attitude reflect deep pride in her role and a strong sense of ownership of Cherokee Indian Hospital’s mission.

#### **Responsiveness**

Mary Ellen’s responsiveness is rooted in compassion. She treats every request, concern, and need — whether from patients, coworkers, or team members — with urgency and care. Whether adjusting a meal for dietary restrictions or jumping in during a busy lunch rush, she remains calm, focused, and quick to act.

She is consistently punctual, organized, and reliable — the type of teammate who keeps things running smoothly even under pressure. Her attention to detail and adaptability have made her a steady presence and a trusted go-to in the cafeteria.

#### **Success**

Mary Ellen is not only essential to the cafeteria, she is a source of pride and positivity for the entire hospital. Her daily efforts support the health and wellness of staff, patients, and visitors alike. She doesn’t just prepare food; She prepares comfort, creating a welcoming environment that feels like an extension of CIHA’s commitment to holistic care.

Her deep sense of ownership over her work helps maintain high standards in the dietary department. And her ability to lift morale during long days, hard shifts, and big events is just as valuable as her cooking.

#### **Teamwork**

Teamwork is Mary Ellen’s natural state. She treats her coworkers with respect, care, and fiercely loyal support. She is always ready to help, always ready to listen. Her colleagues trust her, rely on her, and often say that working with her feels like being part of a family.

She brings this spirit to hospital-wide activities as well, regularly participating in events, celebrations, and staff gatherings. Whether she's helping behind the scenes or simply showing up with her signature smile, Mary Ellen strengthens the bonds that make CIHA feel like home.

### **Innovation**

Mary Ellen may not work in a lab or lead a clinical team, but her innovation is just as impactful. She constantly finds ways to improve efficiency in the cafeteria, especially during short-staffed periods. Her ideas for new menu items have helped increase patient satisfaction and create a more welcoming experience for hospital staff.

She adapts to every situation with a creative mindset and a can-do attitude. Her resourcefulness helps the cafeteria continue serving excellence every day, even when things don't go according to plan.

### **A Heart at the Center of CIHA**

Mary Ellen Helton may not wear a badge that says "clinician," but she is a healer in every sense of the word. Through her care, her kindness, and her commitment, she plays a vital role in helping patients feel safe, staff feel appreciated, and the CIHA community feel connected.

It is with deep appreciation and admiration that we recognize Mary Ellen Helton as a nominee for Employee of the Year at Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority — a shining light who proves that sometimes the simplest acts of service are the most powerful of all.