



PHOENIX SOCIETY FOR BURN SURVIVORS

Phoenix RISE – Houston | Media Fact Sheet

EVENT AT A GLANCE

Phoenix RISE – Houston

Honoring Burn Survivors Howard Tellepsen and Kechi Okwuchi

Thursday, September 24, 2026

11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Junior League of Houston

1811 Briar Oaks Lane

Houston, TX 77027

Event website: <https://www.phoenix-society.org/phoenix-rise-houston>

Expected Attendance: 300 guests

Theme: Celebrate the Journey. Honor a Legacy. Support What's Next.

For the first time, Phoenix Society will host Phoenix RISE in Houston, bringing together 300 burn survivors, families, supporters, healthcare professionals, community leaders, and advocates for a luncheon celebrating resilience, recovery, and the power of community.

The event will recognize two burn survivors with deep connections to Houston: Howard Tellepsen, recipient of Phoenix Society's inaugural Odyssey Award, and Kechi Okwuchi, recipient of the 2026 Phoenix RISE Champion Award.

The luncheon also marks the beginning of Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors' 50th anniversary celebration, recognizing five decades of helping burn survivors and families heal, connect, and thrive.

Robert Duncan, Founder and Executive Chairman of Transwestern, will serve as Master of Ceremonies. The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew "Andy" Doyle, ninth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, will deliver the invocation and blessing.

2026 HONOREES

Howard Tellepsen | Inaugural Odyssey Award Recipient

Howard Tellepsen is Chairman of Tellepsen Corporation, a fourth-generation, family-owned construction company that has helped shape Houston for more than a century. A graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology with a degree in Civil Engineering, Howard has built a career defined by leadership, service, philanthropy, and commitment to his community.

Howard became a burn survivor after a home furnace explosion in 1969. His own experience with the physical and emotional challenges of burn recovery led to a lifelong commitment to supporting others impacted by a burn injury.

Over the years, Howard has served as a dedicated advocate and leader within Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors. Through his leadership, generosity, and willingness to share his experience, he has helped strengthen national programs centered on connection, peer support, recovery, and hope.

Why Howard Was Chosen

The Odyssey Award recognizes a lifetime of extraordinary leadership, service, and impact on behalf of burn survivors and the burn community.

Howard was selected because his impact extends far beyond his own recovery. For decades, he has used his experience, leadership, and resources to help others recognize that life after a burn injury can include purpose, connection, and opportunity. His legacy reflects the resilience, compassion, and sustained service the Odyssey Award was created to honor.

Kechi Okwuchi | 2026 Phoenix RISE Champion Award Recipient

Kechi Okwuchi is a singer, author, motivational speaker, and burn survivor whose story has inspired audiences around the world while helping broaden representation of burn survivors on a national stage.

At age 16, Kechi was one of only two survivors of the 2005 Sosoliso Airlines Flight 1145 crash in Nigeria. She sustained severe burn injuries and underwent years of treatment and more than 100 reconstructive procedures.

Following treatment in Texas, Kechi rebuilt her life through faith, education, and perseverance. She graduated with honors from the University of St. Thomas in Houston and later gained

international recognition as a finalist on America's Got Talent and America's Got Talent: The Champions, including receiving the Golden Buzzer from Simon Cowell.

Today, Kechi uses her platform to promote resilience, self-acceptance, and hope through speaking engagements, media appearances, music, and her memoir, *More Than My Scars*. She is also a passionate advocate for the burn community and Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors.

Why Kechi Was Chosen

The Phoenix RISE Champion Award honors a community member who embodies the values represented by RISE: Resilience, Inspiration, Support, and Empowerment.

Kechi embodies each of those qualities. By sharing her voice and her story, she has helped challenge assumptions about visible differences, encouraged others to embrace their identities, and demonstrated what is possible beyond burn injury. Her continued involvement in the burn survivor community reflects Phoenix Society's belief in the power of connection, representation, and shared experience.

SPECIAL GUESTS

Robert Duncan | Master of Ceremonies

Robert Duncan is Founder and Executive Chairman of Transwestern, one of the nation's leading diversified real estate organizations. Since founding the company in 1978, he has built a values-driven enterprise rooted in integrity, relationships, and community impact.

Throughout his career, Duncan has been deeply committed to civic leadership, philanthropy, and supporting organizations that strengthen lives and communities across Houston. He is also a lifelong friend of honoree Howard Tellepsen.

As Master of Ceremonies for Phoenix RISE – Houston, Duncan will lead guests through a celebration of resilience, perseverance, community, and the lasting impact of support after a burn injury.

Rt. Rev. C. Andrew "Andy" Doyle | Invocation

The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew "Andy" Doyle serves as the ninth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and is known for compassionate leadership, service, and bringing people together across diverse communities.

Since his election in 2008, Bishop Doyle has focused his ministry on reconciliation, faith in action, and caring for people navigating some of life's greatest challenges.

His message of perseverance, connection, compassion, and shared humanity aligns closely with the values at the heart of Phoenix RISE – Houston. Bishop Doyle will deliver the blessing and invocation during the luncheon.

ABOUT PHOENIX SOCIETY FOR BURN SURVIVORS

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors is the nation's leading nonprofit supporting people impacted by burn injury. Since 1977, Phoenix Society has helped burn survivors and their loved ones navigate life after a burn injury through peer support, trusted information and resources, education, advocacy, and connection.

Our survivor-informed programs begin in the hospital and continue throughout every stage of recovery, recognizing that the emotional, social, and physical impacts of a burn injury can evolve over a lifetime.

Phoenix Society's programs include:

- **Phoenix SOAR** (Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery): Trained peer support connecting survivors and loved ones with peers who offer support and encouragement through lived experience.
- **Journey Forward**: Resources and support designed to help survivors and caregivers navigate recovery from the hospital to home and throughout life after a burn injury.
- **Phoenix World Burn Congress**: The world's largest gathering bringing the burn community together for education, peer support, resources, and connection.
- Support groups, educational resources, information and referral, research, and advocacy supporting people throughout every stage of the burn recovery journey.

For nearly 50 years, Phoenix Society has helped ensure burn survivors and their loved ones are never alone throughout life after burn injury.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

Media attending Phoenix RISE – Houston may have opportunities to:

- Cover presentation of the Odyssey Award to Howard Tellepsen
- Cover presentation of the Phoenix RISE Champion Award to Kechi Okwuchi

- Capture remarks from both honorees
- Interview Phoenix Society leadership
- Interview burn survivors and members of the Houston burn community
- Photograph approximately 300 community members, including some of Houston's most prominent families, gathered in support of burn survivors and their families.

MEDIA CONTACT

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