



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors to Honor Howard Tellepsen and Kechi Okwuchi at Phoenix RISE – Houston

300 guests will gather September 24 to celebrate two Houston-connected burn survivors and support lifelong recovery for the burn community

HOUSTON, Texas — September 17, 2026 — Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors will bring together 300 burn survivors, families, healthcare professionals, supporters, and Houston community leaders on September 24 for Phoenix RISE – Houston, a luncheon celebrating resilience, recovery, and the power of community after a burn injury.

The event will take place from 11:30 AM to 1 PM at the Junior League of Houston, 1811 Briar Oaks Lane, and will recognize two burn survivors whose lives and leadership have made an impact in Houston and far beyond.

Houston business and community leader Howard Tellepsen, Chairman of Tellepsen Corporation, will receive Phoenix Society's inaugural Odyssey Award, recognizing his lifetime of leadership, philanthropy, service to the burn community, and commitment to Phoenix Society's mission.

Singer, author, motivational speaker, and burn survivor Kechi Okwuchi will receive the 2026 Phoenix RISE Champion Award in recognition of her resilience, advocacy, and efforts to inspire and empower others.

"Phoenix RISE is about recognizing what becomes possible when survivors are surrounded by community. Howard and Kechi have each turned their own experiences into opportunities to encourage, support, and inspire others, and we are honored to celebrate them in a city that has played such an important role in both of their journeys," said Amy Acton, CEO of Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors.

Tellepsen became a burn survivor following a home furnace explosion in 1969. His experience with the physical and emotional challenges of recovery became the foundation for decades of service and support for others impacted by burn injury, including through his longstanding involvement with Phoenix Society.

As Chairman of Tellepsen Corporation, a fourth-generation family-owned construction company with more than a century of history in Houston, Tellepsen has also built a legacy of leadership and civic engagement throughout the community. Within Phoenix Society, his generosity, advocacy, and willingness to share his experience have helped advance opportunities for peer support, connection, and recovery.

The Odyssey Award recognizes an individual whose enduring commitment has advanced healing, improved lives, and created opportunities for future generations of burn survivors.

Okwuchi's connection to Houston began during her recovery after surviving the 2005 Sosoliso Airlines Flight 1145 crash in Nigeria at age 16. One of only two survivors of the crash, she sustained severe burn injuries and underwent years of treatment and more than 100 reconstructive procedures. She later

graduated with honors from the University of St. Thomas in Houston before reaching an international audience as a finalist on *America's Got Talent* and *America's Got Talent: The Champions*.

Today, Okwuchi is an author, singer, speaker, and advocate focused on resilience, self-acceptance, and hope. Her memoir, *More Than My Scars*, shares her journey from trauma to purpose. The Phoenix RISE Champion Award recognizes her embodiment of Resilience, Inspiration, Support, and Empowerment and dedication to supporting the burn community.

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

Phoenix RISE – Houston also marks the beginning of Phoenix Society's 50th anniversary celebration as the organization approaches its milestone year in 2027. Founded in 1977 from the simple idea of one survivor helping another, Phoenix Society has grown into the nation's leading nonprofit dedicated to people impacted by burn injury.

Funds raised through Phoenix RISE – Houston will help expand access to the programs, resources, and connections burn survivors and their families need throughout recovery and life after a burn injury.

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About Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors is the leading national nonprofit dedicated to empowering burn survivors and their loved ones to heal, connect, and thrive. Since 1977, Phoenix Society has served as a trusted guide throughout every stage of life after a burn injury, providing survivor-informed peer support, resources, education, advocacy, and opportunities for connection. Through programs including Phoenix SOAR, Journey Forward, Phoenix World Burn Congress, virtual support groups, and information and referral services, Phoenix Society brings together survivors, families, healthcare professionals, and supporters to strengthen recovery and ensure no one navigates the journey alone.

For more information, visit phoenix-society.org.

MEDIA CONTACT

Rachel Kudlak

Marketing Lead

rkudlak@phoenix-society.org

616.208.1141