

Online newsroom story:

Hillcrest's Dr. Debra Manuel-Smith Nominated for the 2026 Women's Leadership Award



Hillcrest is proud to announce that **Dr. Debra Manuel-Smith, Head of Human Resources**, is an honored nominee in the Executive of the Year category for the ***Los Angeles Business Journal's 2026 Women's Leadership Symposium and Awards***.

This annual award recognizes outstanding women leaders who are making meaningful contributions to their organizations, industries, and communities they serve. Dr. Manuel-Smith was nominated for her exceptional leadership, commitment to employee engagement, and dedication to strengthening the workplace that supports exceptional care for older adults and community involvement.

As Head of Human Resources at Hillcrest, she oversees workforce strategy, employee experience, organizational culture, and talent development. Although she joined Hillcrest less than one year ago, she brings extensive human resources experience, helping organizations build a strong workplace culture that supports employee growth.

Dr. Manuel-Smith understands that exceptional care begins with exceptional people," said Matthew Neeley, President and CEO of Hillcrest. "Her thoughtful leadership has strengthened our culture, supported our employees, and reinforced Hillcrest's mission of

providing compassionate, person-centered care. We are thrilled to see her recognized with this well-deserved nomination.”

As an accomplished human resources executive, Dr. Manuel-Smith has built her career around creating people-centered workplaces, where employees feel valued and empowered while fostering cultures rooted in accountability, integrity, and compassion. Her leadership has helped organizations strengthen employee engagement and operational effectiveness and ensure that people remain at the heart of every decision.

Her leadership philosophy reflects the belief that people are an organization's greatest asset, and that exceptional employee experiences create exceptional resident experiences. Her approach and genuine care for people reflect Hillcrest’s longstanding commitment to creating an environment where employees, residents, and families can thrive.

Beyond her professional responsibilities, Dr. Manuel-Smith is deeply committed to public service. She currently serves as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission for the City of Azusa and as a member of the Board of Appeals, helping guide responsible community development and thoughtful, transparent decision-making on matters that impact local residents.

Her commitment to service extends beyond public office. Every Sunday, she prepares and serves home-cooked meals to individuals experiencing homelessness. Dr. Manuel-Smith believes leadership is about serving others with purpose, creating opportunities for people to succeed, and making a difference in our workplaces and our communities.

The Women’s Leadership Symposium & Awards celebrates women who are shaping the future of business through innovation, leadership, and community impact. Dr. Manuel-Smith’s nomination highlights the increasingly important role that human resources leaders play in building resilient organizations and advancing excellence in senior living.

Hillcrest congratulates Dr. Manuel-Smith on this well-deserved recognition.