They knew how to shape the future

Allen, Kaiser and Rocklage made the most out of challenging circumstances

For people who are inclined to think that all change is bad and believe nothing can be done to improve the world, we give you the 2011 inductees into Modern Healthcare’s Health Care Hall of Fame.

The three individuals honored here are notable for their tenacity and ingenuity when facing new and challenging circumstances. And it’s no coincidence that they also have been heralded for their integrity, strength of character and compassion—qualities too often in short supply among the leaders of today’s society.

Percy Allen II made his mark by taking the helm of several financially troubled healthcare organizations that some thought couldn’t be saved. But as Allen observes: “Nothing goes under under my watch.”

He also made a reputation as a pioneer in the movement to break the color barrier and bring African-Americans into healthcare management. Allen served not only the hospitals and communities in which he worked, but also the profession as president of the National Association of Health Services Executives and as a mentor to young administrators.

Henry J. Kaiser was a far-sighted industrialist who built highways, dams and bridges as well as the steel and ships that helped win World War II. But, as he predicted, he is best known today for his innovations in prepaid health insurance, hospitals, preventive care and the health foundation that bears his name. He saw the need for a new approach to healthcare for his expanding workforce. And just to show how resistance to change lingers, Kaiser’s employee health insurance plan—a private initiative—was denounced by some as “socialism.”

Sister Mary Roch Rocklage tackled the vexing problem of leading Roman Catholic healthcare during a time of a dwindling population of nuns. Rocklage worked to transition the Sisters of Mercy Health System, which she helped create, into a new era in which laypeople increasingly ran Catholic hospitals. She preserved the traditional mission of Catholic care while strengthening the organization financially and in human resources. She served as a leader nationally in times of change at the American Hospital Association and the Catholic Health Association.

Exactly one year ago, Congress passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the first comprehensive reform of the U.S. healthcare system. At the time, President Barack Obama said the action proved that “We did not fear the future—we shaped it.”

This year’s inductees into the Hall of Fame offer stellar examples of how to live that philosophy.

The profiles of the Hall of Fame winners were written by Ed Finkel, a longtime contributor to the magazine. Finkel can be contacted via e-mail at edfinkel@earthlink.net.

A distinguished panel of judges selected the 2011 inductees to the Health Care Hall of Fame. The six people who participated in the deliberations represent a variety of organizations associated with the healthcare industry.