Many women in the Mesilla Valley "stand out." Several outshine others and are widely involved in public services.

Then there are women who shine brightly in the community but live in the shadows of others. These women are considered the workers, the backbone of what needs to get done, and seldom look to be rewarded. Connie DeBleeck knows one of these individuals, and it inspired DeBleeck to nominate her as one of the Outstanding Women of the Mesilla Valley.

That individual is Dr. Elizabeth Kuchler. Born and raised in El Paso, Kuchler was familiar with Las Cruces and Mesilla, especially from visits to La Posta and Stahmann Farms. When it came time for college, Kuchler decided to come to Las Cruces full time, as a student, at New Mexico State University. She didn't foresee she would never leave Las Cruces, and one day return to work at the university where she earned her nursing degree.

Years before she came to NMSU as an employee, Kuchler worked for the Public Health Department for many years, serving the rural community as a nurse practitioner. Kuchler was a leader at the Las Cruces Department of Health and one of the first Hepatitis C treatment providers across southern New Mexico, working with Dr. Sanjeev Arora and his initial ECHO Hepatitis C telemedicine clinic in New Mexico and as it expanded across the world.

At NMSU’s School of Nursing, Kuchler educates registered nurses to become doctorally prepared family nurse practitioners. Her goal is to produce future rural healthcare providers for New Mexico. Kuchler spends countless hours working with students helping them to succeed in family nurse practitioner courses. During the school year, she provides adolescent healthcare services with the Ben Archer school-based health clinics. Acknowledging the shortage and need for healthcare providers in the community, she provides healthcare as a nurse practitioner.

During the past four years in her “spare time,” Kuchler has been the primary caregiver for her 90-year-old mother, Barbara Kuchler. She may not be recognized within the community as a headliner, DeBleeck said, but Kuchler is recognized as an outstanding leader with her clients, students and colleagues.

Unsung hero finds many ways to put her nursing skills to use