

MEET OUR 2019
LIGHT A FIRE HONOREES

TOGETHER WE RISE

Their causes are varied, their goals
are not—change lives and leave
your corner of the world better
than when you found it

BY JILL JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MELANI LUST

As the year comes to a close and we reflect on the ups and downs in our lives, we here at Moffly Media would like to take a moment to celebrate the people and organizations that make it their mission to bring others up. Year after year our Light a Fire honorees prove that the desire to help others burns brightly.

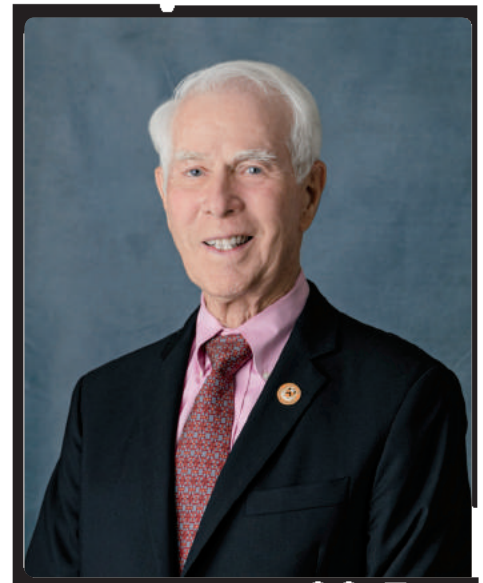
The class of 2019 continues the tradition: They engage kids with disabilities through animals; empower teenage girls; fund scholarships and mentor students; provide supplies to those wounded in combat; spend Sundays teaching peers coding; help immigrants integrate into the community; connect those in poverty with businesses that can guide them; give those with mental health issues a safe haven. One of these organizations touches 134 million lives each year. Another gives every one of its 32,000 employees two days off annually for volunteering.

We have also partnered with Fairfield County's Community Foundation, an organization that promotes philanthropy as a means to create lasting change. We invited FCCF to highlight two groups that are closing the opportunity gap for the underserved of Fairfield County. This year's honorees, Connect-Us and Building One Community, will each receive a \$2,500 grant from FCCF.

Our other honorees were chosen through nominations submitted by readers who were touched by their fortitude and compassion—as we know you will be as well. >>



GIOVANNA MILLER



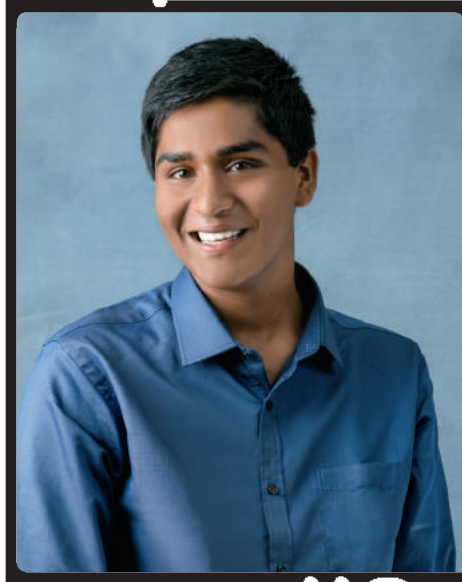
A. REYNOLDS GORDON



CATALINA HORAK



REED EXHIBITIONS, YANCY WEINRICH, COO



PURAB ANGREJI



MICHAEL PARKER



PAM LEWIS



TRACY MCHALE STUART



DR. NOLAN ZEIDE & DR. STEVEN ZEIDE



SHERI WEST



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

A. REYNOLDS GORDON

ORGANIZATIONS: Myron L. and Claire B. Gordon Foundation, Princeton, Yale, the Fugees (an immigrant soccer team), among numerous others

INSPIRATION

"My father founded our family's foundation, so part of my inspiration is simply continuing in his footsteps," says Renn Gordon, an Easton resident. "Part of it is that I consider myself very lucky. I was born from bright parents and I was able to go to the very best schools from grade school through law school." The foundation's focus is education, and Gordon, who attended Princeton and Yale Law School, actually funds half of the scholarship donations himself. Mary Kay Frost, V.P. of Scholarships for the High School Scholarship Foundation of Fairfield, applauds Gordon's generosity, humility and dedication to helping students "with substantial financial need attend college. Mr. Gordon shares with our graduating seniors the rules for a successful life that he inherited from his father—namely, work hard, be kind and do a good deed each day."

COURAGE INTO ACTION

The Myron L. and Claire B. Gordon Foundation has donated over \$500,000 to Fairfield, Bridgeport and Easton schools. Gordon credits his father with funding the foundation, but he has added to the fund for the past decade and his commitment goes beyond finances. "He shines light through the interest he exhibits in the students and the advice he so willingly gives," says Frost. "He meets with the proposed recipients, asks them about their interests and their goals, makes a connection with them and then offers advice that will be helpful in their individual situations. He has attended every award ceremony at both Fairfield Warde and Fairfield Ludlowe."

In addition, Renn and Janet, his bride of twenty-five years, have been mentors for Princeton students interning in Connecticut, through Project 55, a Princeton class of '55 project. Gordon has donated to Princeton annually for sixty-four straight years and to Yale Law School for sixty-one years. The Gordons also have established a charitable remainder trust. "Upon our death, the money is Princeton's, to be used for a series of lectures on the Rule of Law," explains Gordon. Always humble, he's quiet about the fact that the remainder trust reaches seven figures.

Gordon sat on the Board of Directors of Park City Hospital in Bridgeport for over twenty years, and enjoyed being a Junior Achievement advisor in Bridgeport in the past. "I also had fun playing Santa Claus at Mercy Learning Center and handing out gifts to the poor at Christmas parties," he says. Gordon is active in the Democratic Town Committee in Easton and is a recipient of their Neary Award for community service. He has served on both the Pension and Benefits Committee and the Tax Relief for the Aging Committee for two decades.

HOPES & DREAMS

Grateful for the educational doors that have opened to him in his life, Gordon says, "I would love for other people to have the same opportunities I've had—as much and as many as possible."



OUTSTANDING LEADER

GIOVANNA MILLER

ORGANIZATIONS: American Red Cross, Greenwich United Way, YWCA, Stanwich School, Greenwich Country Day School, Greenwich Hospital, Breast Cancer Alliance, Junior League of Greenwich

INSPIRATION

"Inspiration came very early on," says Greenwich resident Giovanna Miller. "My parents were both immigrants. They worked very hard. My grandmother always said no matter what you have, you have the capacity to give something. I was a Girl Scout. I volunteered at food banks. I learned that no matter what our financial responsibilities are, we have the responsibility to give back, and that's what I try to teach my kids." Miller put her career on hold to raise her boys and expected to return to work. "I started volunteering and was so moved, I never looked back," she says. Once she learned the scope of the work of the Red Cross and that of every dollar, ninety-one cents goes to programs and services, she was hooked.

COURAGE INTO ACTION

"Giovanna is the current Board Chair of the Metro NY North Chapter of the American Red Cross. Under her leadership over the past six years, she has grown the size of the board to forty members. It is now considered one of the most active and engaged American Red Cross boards in the country," says Mary Young, CEO of the Metro NY North Chapter. "She also motivates a 700-plus volunteer workforce with her enthusiasm. Giovanna leads by example—you can often see her donating blood, installing free smoke alarms, participating in CPR training, compiling medevac bags for wounded military members at

Walter Reed Medical Center, writing Holiday Mail for Heroes cards at Greenwich Hospital, or encouraging others to join our mission."

Miller says: "It's easy to write a check, and I'm always happy to do that; but what is most rewarding is being on the ground, helping the actual wounded and their families, walking the halls at Kids in Crisis or the YWCA, doing smoke alarm installations. We knock on doors in lower income housing, where often residents don't have smoke alarms. That \$10 alarm really may save lives."

Miller reflects on her first visit to Walter Reed Medical Center: "It was so eye-opening seeing the patients there on crutches and in wheelchairs. We now put together medevac bags for them: basic hygiene items, snacks, water, blankets. We are Skyping with installations overseas to see what supplies we can send. We are constantly taking on these projects that no other board in the U.S. has taken on. The enthusiasm and passion among our board is infectious."

HOPES & DREAMS

"I hope that more people get involved. Think of something you are passionate about. You are never too busy. In every area, there are people who have a need and don't have the opportunities many of us have. I hope my kids will follow in my footsteps, and it will continue for generations and generations." »

BEST FRIENDS TO ANIMALS

DR. NOLAN ZEIDE & DR. STEVEN ZEIDE

ORGANIZATIONS:

Stamford Animal Shelter Alliance, Project Precious, Save a Lab, Stamford Regional Agriscience & Technology Center, Stamford Dog Park (founder), Stamford Arboretum, St. Paul's Day School, AVID Program and more



INSPIRATION

"It starts with the kids," says Dr. Steven Zeide, who runs Bull's Head Pet Hospital in Stamford with his son, Dr. Nolan Zeide. "Pets and kids are so similar. They're honest, sincere and, in their own way, extremely appreciative. I've had a few people guide me along the way, and I feel we are on this earth to help, whether two-legged or four-legged creatures."

The Zeides enjoy educating young people about pets and career options in veterinary medicine and animal science. "Encouraging them to reach for their dreams is rewarding. In some cases, kids don't have direction, and we help them get back on track," explains Steve. "I think our enthusiasm is contagious; we love what we do!"

Nolan adds, "When I was five or six, my dad would take my brother, me and our dogs to a senior home. This is what my dad had us doing when we were little kids. It has been a lifestyle for him and for us our entire lives." Nolan was born and raised in Stamford. "I love this city and our schools," he says. "I want to give back to the community that gives to me."

COURAGE INTO ACTION

For the forty years that Bull's Head Pet Hospital has been open, the Zeides have spread kindness throughout the community: caring for the schools' pets, teaching students of all ages about animals, speaking at events, promoting the dog park, improving the animal shelter. The Zeides also

extend a 50 percent discount to nonprofit rescue organizations and mentor student volunteers. "I'll brag that five out of five [students] we've written recommendations for have gotten into vet school," says Steve.

The heartwarming anecdotes are abundant. "I remember going to Stillmeadows School and speaking to some kids who had significant disabilities," says Steve. "A month later I was at a cancer walk with my dog, and this girl in a wheelchair who could not speak indicated she recognized me and the dog. I had a similar experience at the Jewish Center, with a kid in the pool with an aide. When they remember you and they smile, you know you've touched them. It's nice to feel you have made a mark."

Nolan recounts coming full circle at an Earth Day Festival: "I spoke to 300 kids in the auditorium at Cloonan Middle School; I used to sit in those seats!"

HOPES & DREAMS

Nolan: "I want to inspire my kids so they inspire others. I want them to take it to another level in spreading love and positivity."

Steve: "For me, the future is now! It's also important to look back, improve on who I am and the role our family plays in making this city a better place. I hope to continue helping pets and teaching people how to care for them."

ORGANIZATION:
LiveGirl

BEST FRIEND TO GIRLS

SHERI WEST



INSPIRATION

"I grew up in a small town in Michigan, and giving back was something we always did as a family," says New Canaan resident Sheri West. "Working in corporate finance at GE, I had great success, but I also encountered obstacles that are unique to women. When I had kids, I began thinking more about this issue. About six years ago, we hosted a middle school girl through Fresh Air Fund. She was the same age as our middle child, and it really struck us that she had all the smarts our daughter has but none of the access to opportunities or mentors. At that moment, we sat down as a family and discussed starting LiveGirl."

COURAGE INTO ACTION

Since founding LiveGirl in 2014, West says she "spends every moment, even in my dreams, thinking about how to close the female leadership gap and how to achieve gender parity." In 2018, LiveGirl enrolled over 1,200 girls in its free leadership and mentoring programs in Bridgeport, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Ridgefield, Stamford, Waterbury, Westport and Wilton. This year, LiveGirl partnered with the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs to expand its middle school program statewide, and last summer 200 girls attended LiveGirl's annual summer camp in New Canaan, with transportation provided from as far away as Waterbury.

Kate Reeves, LiveGirl Youth Advisory Board president and recent high school graduate, comments: "LiveGirl taught me to advocate for myself. For many of

my friends, LiveGirl allowed them to aim for goals or roles they had never pictured themselves in. For many middle-schoolers, LiveGirl is a community of kindness and support in a time when girls are so often taught to judge and compete. Sheri has mastered the art of empowering girls to empower each other. This work is more vital than ever. Middle school girls face quickly decreasing rates of self-confidence, which often continue into adulthood, manifesting in workforce trends where women are less likely to ask for a raise or less likely to speak highly of themselves in interviews. Sheri has identified this crisis and created an organization that teaches girls how to support each other, shows them the success they can achieve, and inspires them to advocate for themselves and one another."

West is now established as an expert in girls' leadership. "It's really rewarding to have organizations coming to us and asking us to run workshops," she says, adding, "What we do resonates with parents now more than ever. The world we live in is challenging for girls, especially girls of color. We need to build up girls' self-esteem and social and emotional intelligence." She has a practical outlook regarding social media and the ills it feeds: "Teens aren't going to give it up, so we have to teach them how to curate a positive experience."

HOPES & DREAMS

"I have many: I dream of gender parity, of a female president, of more young women having the confidence to raise their hands and to step up into leadership positions." »



OUTSTANDING
HEALTH ADVOCATE

**MICHAEL
PARKER**

ORGANIZATIONS:

Laurel House, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, AmeriCares, Baker Institute at Cornell University

INSPIRATION

"I believe it's really important to give back," says Michael Parker of Greenwich. "I started with Laurel House because I wanted to help people who were completely underserved. The stigma around mental health made it unpopular. I liked that we were working with people who had no champions." Parker had no relatives plagued by mental illness but was aware of the scope of the problem. "Seventy to eighty percent of the homeless were suffering from mental illness," he explains.

COURAGE INTO ACTION

"It's rewarding making a difference at a hands-on level,

which is what Laurel House does," says Parker, who became involved when he joined its board in 1994. "I'm very proud of the progress we've made, especially over the last ten years."

Linda Autore, Laurel House president and CEO, says: "During its thirty-five-year history, Laurel House has been served by many talented board directors, but none have devoted more time or energy or been more dedicated to mental health recovery than Michael. He has served an unprecedented two terms as chairman of the board. In his early years, Michael played a key role in the Capital Campaign Committee, which raised the funds for Laurel House to purchase the building it currently occupies in Stamford. During his second term, he led a strategic planning process and search for a president and CEO. In 2014 Michael participated in the planning of two key initiatives: the Thinking Well program, addressing cognitive impairment associated with mental illness, and *rtor.org*, a website for those seeking help for mental health."

Parker has overseen Laurel House's transition to an organization with metrics showing outcomes. "We maximize services across a much broader age range than before. Mental illness is now manifesting younger, unfortunately," he says.

Over the decades with Laurel House, Parker's children have taken notice. "They understand how good it feels to give back. That legacy is the tremendous gift of this whole process."

HOPES & DREAMS

"That Laurel House will continue to do what it's doing and evolve to meet needs. I'll continue to support AmeriCares—I love the mission and that it's local. We all need to look for the greater good. There's nothing better than giving back."

MOST DEDICATED BOARD MEMBER

TRACY McHALE STUART

ORGANIZATION: Save the Children

INSPIRATION

"I've always felt a deep commitment to helping people, particularly those who are most vulnerable," says Tracy McHale Stuart of Fairfield, who is a member of the Board of Trustees at Save the Children. "Save the Children focuses on the most vulnerable populations in the world and delivers amazing work on a huge, huge scale. I've gone to see its work in several locations and each time I'm more impressed by the commitment and talent of its people. I'm very business oriented, and these people could work wherever they want and they choose to commit their time to this organization. It's really humbling."

Stuart, who is managing partner and CEO at New York City-based investment firm Corbin Capital Partners, supports more than a dozen local charities and has gotten her children involved in giving back through Southport Congregational Church. But despite running a business and having young kids, she's eager to contribute on a larger scale. "Save the Children is going to places where people are in desperate situations and dire conditions, and they are making an incredible impact. They get involved in the communities and just make things happen."

COURAGE INTO ACTION

Stuart was making things happen at Save the Children long before joining the board last February. "For three years Tracy cochaired the Illumination Gala, our biggest

fundraiser of the year," says Ann Marie Miles, senior director of Individual Philanthropy. "She has visited our programs around the world and taken the time to understand and support our mission to reach every last child."

Save the Children has touched the lives of 134 million children in 120 countries this year alone. "That's a mind-boggling number," notes Stuart, who took her family to Indonesia to see the work Save the Children is doing there. "Save the Children is so important to their community. It was fantastic to have our kids get a sense of what's happening around the world outside their bubble."

HOPES & DREAMS

"I'm on several committees, diving headfirst into the board, and going out to see the programs as much as I can. There is a lot going on at the organization regarding effectiveness: how to take the best ideas and best practices from any given location and apply them and scale up. The businessperson in me is interested in how to operate more effectively and more efficiently over time. But for now I have to earn my stripes." »





MOST DEDICATED TEEN

PURAB ANGREJI

ORGANIZATIONS:

India Cultural Center, Scouts (Eagle Scout), Wilton High School Model Congress, WHS Debate Team, WHS International Club, WHS Band

INSPIRATION

"When I was younger, I thought a lot about how I could amplify the impact I have on the world," says Purab Angreji. "It was kind of like a midlife crisis but in eighth grade. How do I benefit others rather than living in a bubble?" When his sister asked for help with her Girl Scouts Gold Award, Angreji started brainstorming. "I gave her ideas on how to benefit the community long-term," he explains. "With the current global state, a lot of professions will become our future, and the most important is technology. Tech coding classes for youth would help the next generation be prosperous." The result was a coding curriculum he created and taught throughout

high school at Greenwich's India Cultural Center (ICC).

Perhaps Angreji's pressing urge to give back developed in Scouts. "I started scouting in kindergarten," he says, now an Eagle Scout. As a child of immigrants from India and a new kid in town, Angreji found it difficult to meet kids. "Scouting was a great way to get involved in the community, and it blossomed into meeting a group of people who were engaged and had a shared goal of creating a better future for people around us."

COURAGE INTO ACTION

"Since he was a freshman, Purab traveled from Wilton to Greenwich twenty-four Sunday mornings a year to teach coding to grade-school students at ICC," says Margie French, executive director. "Purab's impact on ICC and on his students has been enormous," she continues. "He is motivated to do good and do well. He is a role model to ICC children and admired by parents."

Angreji recalls a highlight of teaching: "A group of kids decided to take what I was teaching them out of the context of making a game and think about how it could be applied in other fields, like medicine. That was rewarding, watching these kids who are just ten years old, applying what I was teaching them to better the world."

HOPES & DREAMS

"I'm young still, so I tend to be quite optimistic," says Angreji, who is a freshman at NYU's Stern School, studying business and political economy. "Business I think holds the most versatility for an individual to have the biggest impact." When he graduates, Angreji hopes to move up the corporate ladder in a larger firm so that he can implement programs for social good. "I'm interested in how to use business and capitalist benefits to directly benefit the social flow," he says.

ORGANIZATIONS: Kids in Crisis, Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Norwalk Mentor Program, Connecticut Food Bank, Homes for the Brave, Ronald McDonald House, Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary, Habitat for Humanity, Ludlow Senior Center

CORPORATE GOOD NEIGHBOR

REED EXHIBITIONS



INSPIRATION

“Giving back is very important to our company,” says Yancy Weinrich, COO of Reed Exhibitions. The 32,000 employees at the U.K.-based company, with North American headquarters in Norwalk, are given two paid days off each year for charity work. “We encourage volunteering, and this goes from the top down across all our business units,” says Weinrich. In the past few years, Reed Exhibitions employees have started volunteering together—forming teams, choosing a project and working together. “For example, building a house for Habitat for Humanity,” she explains. “They spend a day together and feel good about what they’ve accomplished. It really builds morale.”

COURAGE INTO ACTION

“Employees at Reed Exhibitions are some of Kids In Crisis’ most dedicated and passionate volunteers,” says Beth Jabick, Corporate Partnerships Manager at Kids in Crisis. “Many volunteer on their own time, in addition to using their RE Cares time [their paid days off for volunteering].” Beyond helping at the shelter, a holiday gift drive and monthly pizza dinners for Lighthouse meetings (for LGBTQ youth), Reed Exhibitions’ parent company, RELX, has helped fund the Kids in Crisis Teen Talk Program through an annual grant.

Reed Exhibitions has raised more than \$64,000 for Bridgeport Rescue Mission, and employees help distribute Thanksgiving food to the needy. During and after school,

employees mentor children in Norwalk schools through the Norwalk Mentor Program. Reed Exhibitions also donates to Connecticut Food Bank throughout the year; and employees did seven projects with the Food Bank in 2018 alone. They also volunteer to create, serve and share a dinner with the homeless veterans served by Homes for the Brave. “Our company has a number of veterans on staff, and this project is very close to their hearts,” comments Weinrich.

Other partners include Ludlow Senior Center, where Reed volunteers host a Christmas party annually; Ronald McDonald House, where volunteers create healthy lunches and give their time to help with Trees of Hope, the annual fundraiser; and the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary in Newtown, being built in honor of a first-grader killed at Sandy Hook in 2012.

HOPES & DREAMS

“We hope that even more employees will get involved in volunteering,” says Weinrich. “We hope to broaden our partnerships and footprint in the community. We are also moving to a new location where we are focused on creating a company culture our employees want to tell their friends about. We want to be known as a place that really cares.” »

FAIRFIELD COUNTY'S COMMUNITY FOUNDATION COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

Q&A WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CONNECT-US

PAM LEWIS

What's the mission of Connect-Us?

We bring together suburban and urban neighbors to improve the quality of outcomes for young people living in communities of concentrated poverty.

How does your mission fit with Fairfield County Community Foundation's values?

One of the programs FCCF supports is our Connect-Us Academy. The academy is for young people, ages sixteen to twenty-one, who want to cultivate skills and learn to work in a professional business setting. For fourteen weeks students attend after-school workshops at companies throughout Fairfield County. It helps all involved—not just the kids—to better navigate this increasingly complex world. We have corporate partners in various fields: finance, law, marketing, energy, interior design, fashion design, health administration. The graduates are placed in paid summer internships. We placed twenty-four interns last summer, working for \$14 an hour. FCCF actually had two interns.

State officials complain that it's hard to attract businesses to Connecticut. I've spoken up about working to impact the culture. Businesses should



invest in the kids of Bridgeport. Millennials want to work for companies that are socially responsible. We are that bridge—between the kids and the community/businesses. Our goal is to continue to find ways to bring people together who don't normally come together. There's no reason Connecticut couldn't

be a good model for the country, given the level of inequality that exists in Fairfield County.

What is your organization's biggest accomplishment?

I think it's our youth leadership team. The team meets every Tuesday, September through May. These young people, ages fifteen

to twenty-five, come together to take responsibility for supporting the growth of other young people. They watch a lot of documentaries to understand what's going on in the world and become critical thinkers. They invite others to participate in our programs. Since 2014, over 2,400 young people and their families have been engaged with Connect-Us.

What does the future hold for Connect-Us?

I'm excited about the growth of our business partnerships. I think we could place twice as many interns next year. We are finding ways to tap into resources to support the growth of our kids. We have twenty-five partners, including Bridgewater, which leads résumé writing workshops. JPMorgan Chase is coming up to lead workshops. We are getting traction, and I'm excited about that.

Words of Praise

Jill Egan, event planner at Bridgewater Associates, comments: "Pam's after-school program adds huge value to the underprivileged population. Connect-Us teaches important social skills, gives academic resources and really captures the essence of what it is to develop young leaders for society."

FAIRFIELD COUNTY'S COMMUNITY FOUNDATION COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

Q&A WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BUILDING ONE COMMUNITY

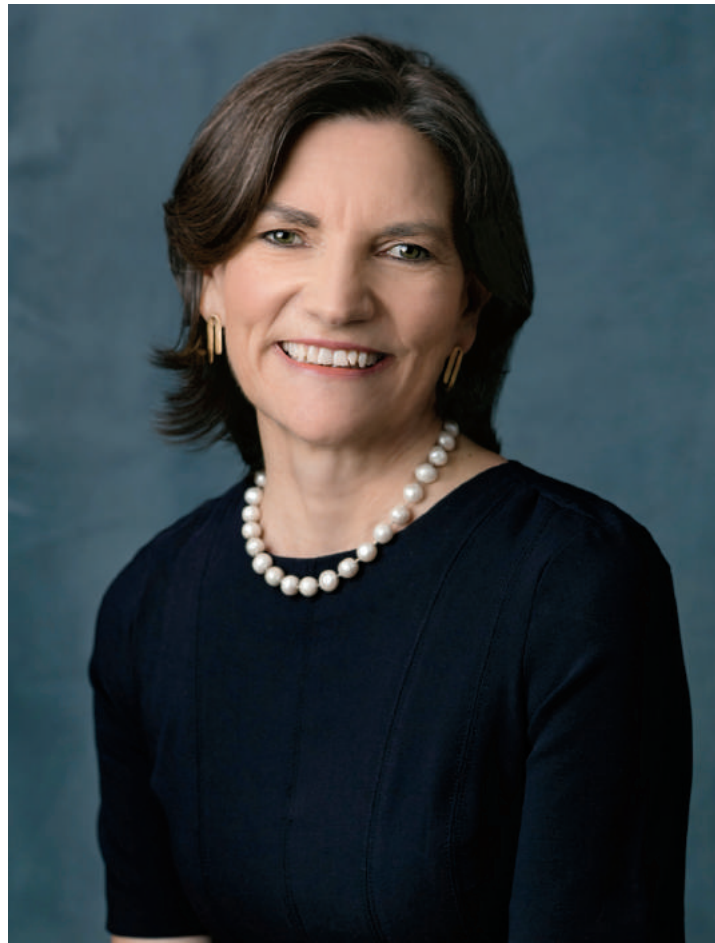
CATALINA HORAK

What is the mission of Building One Community?

To support local immigrants on their journey toward being successful members of the community—what we call their integration journey. Our goal is to advance successful integration of all immigrants and their families regardless of where they are on that journey. Some have been here working for ten years, with a basic level of education, and they still are not speaking English. Others, from the Middle East for example, have been exposed to English and a higher level of education and learn English rapidly. Each has different needs on their path to becoming contributing members of the community.

How does your mission fit with Fairfield County Community Foundation's values?

Immigration is one of FCCF's core issues. They are all about closing the opportunity gap, serving the community, making sure everyone has a fair chance. It's exactly what we do. Ethnic diversity and inclusion—80 percent of our staff are people of color, so we represent the people we are serving. We are about equity and collaboration.



What is your organization's biggest accomplishment?

Making sure that we stay true to our values and mission during a time of very rapid growth and that we continue to facilitate the programs based on real needs and not our perception. Immigration is such a national issue but also a local issue, and


the solutions many times are at the local level. We are part of the local solution.

What does the future hold for Building One Community?

These are very challenging times for many of the people we serve. It's a time of uncertainty and fear, so we need to make sure that

we understand that fear and we address it and work with local elected officials, our partners and the community at large to provide the stable environment that everyone needs, that kids need. We are committed to advocacy and applying our knowledge to shape immigration policies. We are a new organization—we are only eight years old—so also making sure people know who we are, build our brand, and be the go-to place for area immigrants.

Words of Praise

Robert Wells, program coordinator of MAV Foundation (an organization dedicated to eradicating hunger) comments, "Through its Workforce Development Program, BIC offers an underserved immigrant population a chance to participate in certificate-based training in culinary and catering, home health aide, and construction and landscaping at no cost. BIC offers English language learning instruction for all ages. True to its name, BIC collaborates with over fifty organizations to provide access to education, healthcare, childcare, legal advice and more. These collaborations are vital for the holistic, wraparound services that BIC supplies to over 3,300 community members a year." 

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Light a Fire 2019

A CELEBRATION OF GIVING

SAVE THE DATE
 Thursday,
 December 5,
 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.



Photos by Michael Lenz

Please join us as we honor the extraordinary work of our community heroes.

**Plus: Community Impact Awards, honoring two outstanding nonprofits
 Presented by Fairfield County's Community Foundation**

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