

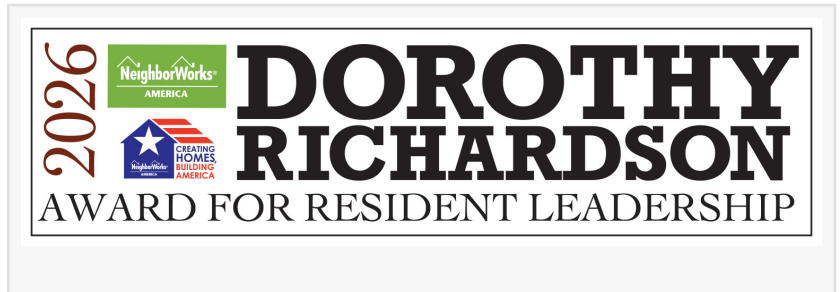
NeighborWorks® America Honors Four Community Leaders with the Dorothy Richardson Award for Resident Leadership

Honorees from Massachusetts, Virginia, California, and Iowa are recognized for service, leadership, and civic action as NeighborWorks marks America250.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES,
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EINPresswire.com/ -- NeighborWorks®

America is proud to announce the recipients of its annual [Dorothy Richardson Award for Resident Leadership](#), recognizing four community leaders whose work has changed the places they call home.



“

This year's honorees demonstrate what is possible when residents step forward to strengthen their communities. Their leadership will have an impact for years to come.”

*Marietta Rodriguez, President
& CEO of NeighborWorks
America*

The awards, presented to recipients from across America, recognize leaders who strengthen their communities, bring people together, and uplift their neighbors.

This year's recipients are:

Felix Colon of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, nominated by NewVue Communities;

Carmelita Wood of Charlottesville, Virginia, nominated by Piedmont Housing Alliance;

Olivia Gomez of Planada, California, nominated by Self-

Help Enterprises; and

Margaret J. Wright of Des Moines, Iowa, nominated by Neighborhood Finance Corporation.

"I am inspired by the people who know their communities best, the people who live there," said NeighborWorks America President & CEO Marietta Rodriguez. "This year's honorees demonstrate what is possible when residents step forward to lead, bring people together, and

turn ideas into action that strengthens their communities. Their leadership will have an impact for years to come."

The awards are named for Dorothy Mae Richardson, who, in the 1960s, fought disinvestment in her Pittsburgh community by bringing neighbors, bankers, and government officials together to find a path to rehabilitating and repairing homes, saving a neighborhood from neglect. The effort resulted in [Neighborhood Housing Services of Pittsburgh](#), a new model for reinvestment that became the cornerstone for NeighborWorks America, a congressionally chartered nonprofit that expanded the model across the country.

As part of [America250](#), the bipartisan initiative commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States, NeighborWorks is showcasing the stories of the residents and neighbors who have built the country's communities from the ground up. The civic tradition Dorothy Richardson embodied in 1960s Pittsburgh, of neighbors coming together to solve shared problems, stretches back to the country's founding and continues through the work of this year's honorees. As the United States marks a quarter-millennium of American democracy, NeighborWorks honors the resident leaders who ensure every community is respected for the country's next 250 years.

Felix Colon, nominated by NewVue Communities, Fitchburg, Massachusetts

Colon founded Meek and Humble Ministries, which cooks and delivers approximately 80 hot meals three times per week to individuals and families in need. He stepped in as a volunteer resident leader in 2020, taking over outreach efforts for another local organization whose director was at high risk from the pandemic, and then started his own ministry to keep feeding unhoused neighbors. He has since partnered with area nonprofits, including NewVue, and with a local restaurant and church that lend their kitchens.

"He goes to where they are, instead of waiting for them to come to him," said Francisco Ramos, director of Community Organizing for NewVue. "Felix has been very clear in his mind and his heart that his mission is to humanize unhoused individuals and families within our society and has been committed to that goal for years."

Carmelita Wood, nominated by Piedmont Housing Alliance, Charlottesville, Virginia

Wood has worked for more than a decade to keep the historically Black neighborhood of Fifeville affordable for her neighbors, serving as president of its neighborhood association after becoming a homeowner with support from Piedmont Housing Alliance. Having witnessed displacement in neighborhoods like Vinegar Hill, she helped shape a land use plan that eliminates exclusionary single-family zoning and 2023 zoning reforms that provide bonus density for affordable housing. She founded an anti-displacement group and is pushing to bring a grocery store to a neighborhood considered a "food desert."

“Her roots and her history embody a lot of what’s happening in housing and development,” said Luis Oyola, director of the Piedmont Community Land Trust. “She does the day-to-day behind-the-scenes work, and she does public advocacy. I think she really understands that balance of being a leader.”

Olivia Gomez, nominated by Self-Help Enterprises, Visalia, California

A lifelong member of the Planada community and a member of Self-Help Enterprises’ Board of Directors, Gomez serves as a bridge between neighbors, public agencies, and nonprofit partners, much like Richardson herself. When a flood devastated Planada in 2023, Gomez led volunteer response and recovery efforts, working with the Sheriff’s Department to reopen the community after evacuation and advocating with state legislators for recovery funding. Those efforts brought long-term housing stability to 45 families, and she continues to work with county and state agencies to strengthen levels to prevent future flooding.

Tom Collishaw, President & CEO of Self-Help Enterprises, described Olivia Gomez as a community leader with deep roots in Planada. He noted that Gomez grew up at the Bear Creek farm labor housing project before helping her parents build their own home via the mutual self-help housing program. She later earned a college degree and engaged in community service through leadership at the Community Services District, the primary public institution serving her rural community. Collishaw highlighted Gomez’s empathy and persistence in representing the needs of local residents.

Margaret J. Wright, nominated by Neighborhood Finance Corporation, Des Moines, Iowa

Wright works to ensure that Des Moines’ historically opportunity-limited neighborhoods receive the resources they need, serving as president of the King-Irving Neighborhood Association and on the Near Northside Neighbors Leadership Teams. After a YMCA branch closed in 2021, she championed for a replacement gathering place and, when early plans fell short of residents’ expectations, amplified local voices to change them. The \$22 million Reichardt Community & Recreation Center opened this spring with the city’s only indoor pool, a track, a basketball court, an innovation lab and a community kitchen, where cooking classes she developed now build connections and reduce isolation.

“When the northside neighborhood needed a new recreation center, Margaret believed that her neighborhood deserved an excellent building with a wide range of options,” said Stephanie Murphy, executive director of Neighborhood Finance Corp. “She made it her mission to lift community voices and make sure the center would meet everyone’s needs. She’s worked tirelessly for our community, and we’re pleased to see her recognized for the work she does every day.”

About NeighborWorks America

For nearly 50 years, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corp., a Congressionally chartered national nonprofit known as NeighborWorks® America, has strived to make every community safer and more prosperous. Our network of excellence includes nearly 250 nonprofits in every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and on Native lands. NeighborWorks offers grant funding, peer exchange, technical assistance, evaluation tools, and access to best-in-class training as the nation's leading trainer of housing and community development professionals. NeighborWorks network organizations build homes and apartments, expanding the supply of affordable housing in every community; provide financial counseling and coaching that increases self-sufficiency; encourage resident leadership, and collaborate with local stakeholders in the areas of health, economic development, employment, and education. In Fiscal Year 2025, for every dollar received from Congress, NeighborWorks network and NeighborWorks America attracted an additional \$74 of investment from other sources. For more information, visit <https://www.neighborworks.org>.

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