

**HOUSING FORUM AWARDS PRESENTATION**  
**PHFA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBIN WIESSMANN**  
**MAY 2, 2024**

Good morning, everyone. Welcome back to Day Two of the Housing Forum. If you thought yesterday was good, just wait and see what we have for you today.

We now have an event that is a very special part of the Housing Forum – our awards ceremony for our 2024 Housing Pioneers. Plus, we’re introducing a new award this year – we call it our Legacy Award.

We’ll start with this year’s Housing Pioneer award winners. There’s a lot of good affordable housing work going on all around the state. I think it’s a good idea to single out some of our best housing leaders. Not just to recognize all they’ve done. But also, to challenge other people to follow in their footsteps.

Our Housing Pioneers show what can be achieved with some hard work and some bright ideas. With that introduction, it gives me great pleasure to name our 2024 Housing Pioneer award winners.

Our first award winner is someone who has devoted her career to advancing the cause of affordable housing. Tammy Thompson is with Catapult Greater Pittsburgh. Tammy, would you please come up to the stage?

Okay, let me tell you a little about Tammy and why we are recognizing her today. Tammy is the founding executive director of Catapult Greater Pittsburgh. Catapult is a non-profit organization that focuses on anti-poverty initiatives and economic justice.

Tammy has more than 20 years of experience in leading community-based programs that support and empower low-income individuals and families. She is the executive producer of "We Wear the Mask - The Hidden Face of Poverty." That is a documentary that highlights the stigma associated with women in poverty.

Tammy also is the owner of T3 Consulting and T3 Media, which provide poverty trauma education, advocacy, and consulting services. At a time when it seems that more people are falling into poverty, too little is being done to tell their story.

Tammy is well known in western Pennsylvania for using her voice and her platforms to raise awareness about poverty and economic injustice – and to create solutions.

Tammy, for your efforts on behalf of those who are too often pushed into the shadows, it gives me great pleasure to present you with PHFA's Housing Pioneer Award.

Can we please give Tammy a round of applause?

We have a second Housing Pioneer Award winner this year. I believe she thought she could slip quietly into retirement. But we felt it was important to recognize her many years of accomplishments in housing. Bonnie Zehler of Luminest Community Development, would you please come up to be recognized?

With a career that spanned more than 33 years, Bonnie Zehler is a recognized housing leader in Franklin, Adams, and Cumberland counties. She has had a tremendous impact by leading the development of affordable housing to benefit low- and moderate-income residents in those counties. She was the driving force behind the creation of the non-profit Valley Community Housing Corporation, now well known as Luminest.

Under her leadership as executive director, Luminest:

- Achieved status as a Community Housing Development Organization.
- It developed seven LIHTC properties, creating 282 affordable units, and manages 324 units.
- And it sold six first-time homebuyer homes and provides Homeowner Rehabilitation and Whole Home Repair programs.

Bonnie was the executive director of the Franklin County Housing Authority from 1999 to 2017.

- Under her watch, it grew its programs to include 264 public housing units.
- 311 Housing Choice Vouchers.
- Added a Housing Choice Voucher Family Self-Sufficiency program; and much more.

Somehow, while doing all this, Bonnie served on a number of boards including:

- The South-Central Community Action Program Homeless Advisory Board.
- The Harrisburg Regional Housing Advisory Board.
- The Elm Street Advisory Board.
- The United Way of Franklin County.

- The Waynesboro Hospital Advisory Board.
- And the Boys and Girls Club of Chambersburg.

I could go on and on, but clearly her involvement on local boards is impressive.

Our Housing Pioneer Award recognizes Bonnie, not only for her many accomplishments in affordable housing, but also for her selfless devotion to communities across south-central Pennsylvania.

And so, it gives me great please to present Bonnie Zehler with a 2024 Housing Pioneer Award.

Bonnie, congratulations on this honor, and thanks for all you've done to impact affordable housing in Pennsylvania.

In addition to our Housing Pioneer Awards, this year we also wanted to introduce an honor we are calling our Housing Legacy Award. We've never given this award before – this year is a first! With this award, we want to recognize a person, or an organization, that has done an exceptional amount of good work for many years and, through their legacy, will continue to change lives into the future.

The first organization we'd like to salute with our inaugural Legacy award is ... Project HOME of Philadelphia.

Project HOME was created, of course, by Sister Mary Scullion and Joan Dawson-McConnon when they were moved by the needs of so many who were living on the streets of Philadelphia with little chance of better fortunes. We recognized Sister Mary and Joan with Pioneer Awards a few years ago. But today we wanted to specifically recognize Project HOME.

Since 1989, Project HOME has been a leader in providing comprehensive and effective services to individuals experiencing chronic street homelessness. The Project HOME model of Housing, Opportunities for Employment, Medical Care, and Education is proven to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. They start with 'round-the-clock street outreach and street medicine. They couple that approach with behavioral health and recovery services to prevent chronic street homelessness from taking root.

Regardless of a person's age or life situation, Project HOME provides care and compassion that has turned around countless lives in Philadelphia. Project HOME provides a model of success that has proven its effectiveness during the last 35 years.

Sister Mary and Joan couldn't be with us today to accept this award, but they have provided us with a short video message.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

Before Project HOME, there were very few options for the homeless in Philadelphia. Sister Mary and Joan saw the high level of need and stepped in to help. Through Project HOME, they demonstrate to each of us just what can be done when you apply hard work, innovative ideas, and a caring heart to intractable social challenges. Their legacy of Project HOME will continue to have a major impact in Philadelphia for decades to come.

Now, there's someone else we'd also like to recognize today with a Housing Legacy Award. This person has a lifetime of housing achievements in the city of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. Larry Swanson of ACTION-Housing ... will you please come up on the stage?

Many of you in the room already know Larry and all he's accomplished throughout this career. But let me provide a little refresher. Larry Swanson has been the executive director of ACTION-Housing in Pittsburgh since 2005 – for 19 years. Additionally, he oversees three subsidiaries that implement construction, asset management, and tax credit efforts for the organization.

Prior to that position, he had been deputy executive director. In that role, he was responsible for real estate development and the oversight of property and asset management of more than 1,800 units with a combined value of \$200 million.

He joined ACTION-Housing in 1979 and, together with the previous executive director, he built a comprehensive regional affordable housing organization. But Larry isn't just being recognized because of his leadership role at ACTION-Housing. He has done so much more outside the organization.

Larry was a founding member of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania and served as its board president from 1985 until 1999. He remains on the board and is president of the Alliance's fundraising affiliate.

He served on the state advisory committee that developed the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program for Pennsylvania.

He also helped develop a mortgage assistance program that at first operated locally and now operates statewide. It's the largest publicly funded program of its type in the country.

I could keep going, but I think this gives you some insight into why Larry is so deserving of this award. Few people in Pennsylvania have done as much to support affordable housing.

Thank you, Larry, for being a housing leader in Pennsylvania, and it's an honor to present you with our Housing Legacy Award.

Thank you everyone for coming to our special awards ceremony this morning. We hope you found it to be inspirational.