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**Two Women Leading Affordable Housing Solutions Named 2023 Charlotte Woman of the Year**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (July 24, 2024) – The 2023 Charlotte Woman of Year award, an annual honor that recognizes and celebrates women who have demonstrated exemplary civic leadership and service, is being given to two women leading affordable housing solutions: Laura Belcher, president and CEO of Habitat for Humanity of the Charlotte Region and Dionne Nelson, president and CEO of Laurel Street.

“The innovative civic leadership of both Laura and Dionne is truly something to celebrate! Through years of unwavering focus on creative and practical solutions, each of them has made a significant impact in providing affordable housing to hundreds of people in our community, especially in 2023,” said Jill Flynn, board chair of Charlotte Woman of the Year. “These two outstanding leaders are now part of the legacy of prior Charlotte Woman of the Year honorees who, over decades, have been catalysts for change and positive progress that benefits the well-being of our community.”

In 2023, Belcher led the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project which accelerated the completion of The Meadows at Plato Price, a 39-home community in West Charlotte by more than a year through the engagement of over 2,100 volunteers from 31 states and numerous countries to build 27 single-family affordable homes. The effort also earned \$8 million in corporate and in-kind gifts. In addition, Habitat Charlotte Region celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2023 by serving its 4000th family. Since Belcher joined Habitat Charlotte Region in 2014, the organization has seen nearly a 400% increase in families served through growth in new home production, increases in existing home preservation repair efforts, and the expansion of financial literacy programs.

“Laura is laser focused on tackling the issue of affordable housing and leading the way in removing barriers to homeownership for working families in the Charlotte Region,” said Melissa McGuire, managing director of Sherpa and who nominated Belcher for the award. “She is committed to providing more diverse housing solutions and has made Habitat Charlotte Region both an economic driver and provider of significant opportunity for civic engagement in our community.”

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Nelson, a national thought leader in mixed-income housing and founder of Laurel Street and LSA Management, is making an impact on the economic mobility of residents in Charlotte and across the Southeast. As a member of Charlotte’s local Advisory Board of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, her insights have helped Knight Foundation facilitate and evaluate its \$11 million investment in the Historic West End including grants to resident-led organizations like the West Side Community Land Trust and Historic West End Partners to produce resident desired amenities, housing and businesses. She provides strategic guidance to nonprofit executives to ensure their organizations, like the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, are included in meaningful conversations that affect their work in affordable housing. Nelson also serves on the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council, providing an important perspective to CEO and business leaders improving how inequity in housing is addressed by the executives driving community change in Charlotte.

Laurel Street, which she founded in 2011, has a development and acquisition portfolio valued at \$1 billion and includes over 5,500 units in 55 communities – all of which serve mixed-income households. Nelson’s work addresses affordability needs in communities facing rapid gentrification or suffering from severely limited affordable options. Recently, her work included Gilfield Park, a 80-unit senior housing community developed in partnership with the community development corporation (CDC) affiliate of The Park Church and Varick on 7th, a 105-unit mixed-income community in Uptown Charlotte with the CDC affiliate of Little Rock AME Zion Church.

“As our city grapples with rapid growth, income inequality and legacies of racism, Dionne’s leadership, commitment and projects are a testament to serving and delivering sustained impact and benefits to residents who need it the most,” said Charles Thomas, Charlotte program director, Knight Foundation and who nominated Nelson. “She is a strategic thought leader and partner with many organizations to find solutions to the affordable housing crisis.”

Both honorees will be celebrated at an event at the Foundation For The Carolinas in October 2024.

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[Download headshot of Laura Belcher](#)

[Download headshot of Dionne Nelson](#)

***About Charlotte Woman of the Year:***

*Since 1955, the Charlotte Woman of the Year annually recognizes and celebrates a woman who has demonstrated exemplary civic leadership and exceptional service, which has had a lasting impact on the quality of life in our city. The Charlotte Woman of the Year honorees are catalysts for change and positive progress, benefiting the well-being of the Charlotte community. Their ongoing legacy of civic service ensures a brighter future for all.*

*Learn more about Charlotte Woman of the Year at [www.charlottewomanoftheyear.com](http://www.charlottewomanoftheyear.com)*