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Leaders and Community Gather to Honor Legacy of Northside Activist Dorothy Mae Richardson

PITTSBURGH (October 16, 2019) – Today, NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania (NWWPA) and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) unveiled an official State Historical Marker honoring the legacy of NWWPA founder Dorothy Mae Richardson. State and local officials, leaders from NeighborWorks America, Northside residents, members of Richardson’s family, and other supporters joined NWWPA and PHMC to celebrate the local and national impact of her work.

A lifelong Northside resident, Richardson founded Neighborhood Housing Services—which would eventually become NWWPA—to address the lack of safe and affordable housing in her community. Richardson and her neighbors brought together financial institutions and government officials to revitalize their neighborhood. Her work to secure more affordable homes in her home city inspired the creation of the agency that eventually became NeighborWorks America.

Over the past 50 years, NWWPA has helped thousands of families to purchase their first homes, so they can experience the personal and community stability that accompanies homeownership.

“NWWPA has continued Dorothy’s work to improve the lives of residents and continues to meet its mission to promote stable, vibrant communities by providing our neighbors with comprehensive financial empowerment and homeownership services,” said County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. “We are grateful that this work began in Allegheny County, fortunate to have the work of Dorothy Mae Richardson continue throughout the nation, and appreciate the work that NWWPA does each day to improve our neighborhoods and the lives of our residents.”

The historical marker is located at the intersection of Jacksonia and Arch Streets, at the location of Neighborhood Housing Services’ first office.

“Dorothy Richardson, a homemaker-turned-activist, and her neighbors created a model of resident-led community development here in the Northside that inspired a national movement and laid the foundation for NeighborWorks America,” said Colin Kelley, NWWPA CEO.

Nearly 250 community development organizations across the country are now part of the NeighborWorks America network.

“NeighborWorks America established the Dorothy Richardson Award for Resident Leadership in her honor more than 20 years ago to recognize the importance of resident engagement to healthy and vibrant neighborhoods,” said Sheila Rice, Interim Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at NeighborWorks America. “We are grateful to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania for designating this historical marker to acknowledge her achievements.”

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Following the historical marker dedication, NWWPA hosted a 50th Anniversary reception at The Mattress Factory, where attendees celebrated Mayor William Peduto's declaration of October 16, 2019, as "NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania Day" in the City of Pittsburgh.

"Dorothy Mae Richardson and her neighbors did more than just save their Northside neighborhood from the wrecking ball," said Mayor William Peduto. "By bringing together residents, banks and government officials to revitalize their neighborhood, they established the new field of community-based development that spread from Pittsburgh to cities across the country."

Today's events, which drew more than 120 attendees, were made possible thanks to the generous support of sponsors NeighborWorks America, PNC, BNY Mellon, Citizens Bank, First National Bank, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Washington Financial Bank, Northside Leadership Conference, Northside Community Development Fund, and The Northside Chronicle.

About NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania

NeighborWorks Western Pennsylvania (NWWPA) was founded by now-legendary community organizer Dorothy Richardson to address the lack of safe and affordable housing on Pittsburgh's Northside in a model that inspired numerous community-based organizations all around the country. NWWPA is now a leader in sustainable homeownership, offering classroom-based homebuyer and financial education, and one-on-one pre-purchase counseling, at its HomeOwnership Center in Uptown and in communities throughout the region, in collaboration with neighborhood-based partners. Learn more at <https://www.neighborworkswpa.org/>.