

THE BUSINESS TOOL FOR REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS

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REALTOR

MAGAZINE.REALTOR



A Grip on Rural Poverty

Good Neighbor Award Winner
Chet Choman



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION of
REALTORS®

When Giving

Meet 10 REALTORS® who make us grateful.

By Sara Geimer

REALTORS® step up. They're problem solvers. They're stop-talking-about-it-and-start-doing-it types. And each year, the National Association of REALTORS® Good Neighbor Awards spotlights great exemplars of that can-do spirit, whether their goal is alleviating homelessness, bringing clean water to parched villages, alleviating chronic hunger, or giving a leg up or moments of joy to others in need. Through the Good Neighbor Awards, we recognize and support the works of 10 honorees each year. Those they serve have shared with us stories of profound thanks. But gratitude works both ways. These Good Neighbors say giving is a gift in its own right. The *opportunity* to serve others is reason enough to feel grateful. They step up for a deceptively simple reason: because they can. **See their full stories and videos at nar.realtor/gna.**



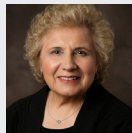
Omayra Borges jumped in to save lives after Puerto Rico's storm. **Page 4**



Elias Thomas has worked to make clean water available to thousands in India. **Page 6**

Honorable Mentions

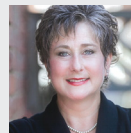
From hundreds of nominations, we selected five more REALTORS® who make a difference through passionate volunteer work. They will each receive \$2,500 grants for their charities. Read their full profiles at realtorm.ag/hon-mentions.



ANNETTE EVANS Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices New Jersey Properties, Livingston, N.J. Evans

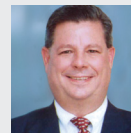
has spent 30 years as a volunteer board member at JESPY House, a nonprofit advancing indepen-

dence for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She has taken on multiple roles, including helping parents prepare for their adult



children to age in place. **NECIA T. FREEMAN** ABR, CRS, Old Colony, REALTORS®, of Huntington, Barboursville,

W.V. Freeman founded Backpacks & Brown Bags to feed children who do not reliably have food



on the weekends and to help opioid-addicted women, some of whom are these children's mothers, find a path to recovery.

Is a Gift



Chet Choman provides shelter and support for the rural poor. **Page 8**



Jeremy Lichtenstein ensures that kids have enough to eat on the weekend. **Page 10**



Joy Nelson offers a bucolic getaway for people with a range of disabilities. **Page 12**

RICHARD L. HARRIS CCIM, Richard Harris & Associates Inc., Palm Harbor, Fla. Harris is volunteer president of The Arc Tampa Bay, which empowers people of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities. His business expertise helped the nonprofit reduce costs, increase revenue, and obtain grants to extend its reach.



MICHAEL LAFARGUE Coldwell Banker Residential, Chicago LaFargue is a powerhouse in multiple nonprofits supporting Chicago neighborhoods. He championed the installation of community

security cameras, which led to arrests in the murder of a local judge. He also heads a community-based coalition that seeks to ensure that a



5-mile train route expansion benefits underserved areas.
JACK PERSIN Baird & Warner, Naperville, Ill. Persin

co-founded Naperville Responds for Veterans, a nonprofit that helps low- and moderate-income veterans remain in their home as they age. The organization has helped nearly 200 veterans, making crucial home repairs and adding retrofits like wheelchair ramps.

2018 Web Choice

Although the Good Neighbor Awards judges (page 14) selected our 2018 winners, all 10 finalists competed for “Web Choice” honors through public voting online. This year, a record 165,000 votes were cast. Congratulations



to top vote-getters Michael LaFargue, Necia T. Freeman, and Joy Nelson, who receive bonus grants thanks to sponsor realtor.com®.

A Grip on Rural Poverty

Chet Choman helps homeless people in an area larger than Massachusetts. BY ERICA CHRISTOFFER

A surprising number of people living in Colorado's San Luis Valley use firewood as their only source of heat. Despite the area's hauntingly beautiful yet barren landscape, it's the poorest region in the state, with roughly a quarter of the residents living below the federal poverty line. REALTOR® Chet Choman operates his company Colorado Realty and Land Co. here, out of an old repurposed gas station near the train tracks. It's a metaphor for his persona. He's humble and soft-spoken on the outside, yet incredibly resourceful with a servant heart on the inside. One thing he'll never tire speaking about is La Puente Home.

The simplest way to describe La Puente is as a homeless shelter. But today it's much more than that, largely because of Choman, a co-founder and member of the organization's board of directors for nearly 40 years. "He really believes in the dignity, opportunity, and life value of having housing," says Lance Cheslock, La Puente's executive director. "For REALTORS®, there's a fulfillment in watching an individual or family find housing, but Chet gets more passionate when he helps people who are having trouble." He is essentially providing a safety net for struggling communities that are largely invisible.

Choman understands homelessness firsthand. He was born inside a displaced persons camp in Germany right after World War II. His parents had spent five years in a concentration camp working in the fields, and another five in the displaced persons camp before immigrating to the U.S. in 1951. They were sponsored by a family in exchange for two years of farm work.

"When you have that background, you have a sensitivity toward homeless people," Choman says. "[La Puente] started off with nothing, much like my folks did. But it has blossomed over the past 40 years. Now with a \$2 million budget, so much of that is the help of volunteers and community support—people helping people."

Moving a Community Out of Poverty

In 1979, eight years into his real estate career, Choman was contacted by a local nun after two people froze to death during a severe winter. Choman and four others met to address the area's housing problems and realized they had to get organized. They each chipped in \$5 so they'd have enough to open a checking account for the organization that would become one of the first rural homeless shelters in the country.

The San Luis Valley is a sprawling, flat desert juxtaposed with 360 degrees of mountain views. The isolated region's main commercial business is agriculture. Farmers primarily grow potatoes, alfalfa, and barley, but commodity prices are sometimes so low that they can't make it through the off-season.

To meet the persistent need in the valley, La Puente has grown beyond the 45-bed shelter that opened its doors in 1982. La Puente now serves about 16,000 people annually—that's one out of every three people in a six-county area larger than the state of Massachusetts. "A founder sometimes has problems changing things, but Chet has always been open to new ideas," says Cheslock.

For Choman, it was important for the charity to move beyond offering shelter. The first La Puente program addition was Adelante in 1991, which helps parents secure housing, find jobs, and access financial training. PALS Children's Program, created in 1997, is a licensed after-school and summer program that focuses on children who face instability, abuse, or poverty.

Today, La Puente also has 15 small food pantries across their service area, including one in a town of only 160 people. "Typically, homelessness is viewed as an urban problem," he says. Choman's life work entails a more sweeping spotlight.

LA PUENTE HOME

1 out of 3 area residents receive help | lapuente.net

Contact Chet Choman at colorealty@gmail.com to learn more



“Being born into homelessness gave me a certain sensitivity to the issue. I feel a responsibility to help people who struggle to find housing.”



About the program

NAR's Good Neighbor Awards is celebrating its 19th year of honoring REALTORS® who make an extraordinary impact through volunteer work. Since 2000, the Good Neighbor program has donated more than \$1.1 million to REALTOR®-led charities. The five 2018 Good Neighbor Award winners will be honored in November during the REALTORS® Conference & Expo in Boston. The winners' charities will each receive a \$10,000 grant. In addition to the winners, five Honorable Mentions will each receive \$2,500 for their community cause. We choose the Good Neighbor Award winners through a multistage judging process. Then the public votes to choose which of the 10 finalists receive bonus grant money as Web Choice Favorites. This year, more than 165,000 votes were cast. Nominations open in January for the 2019 Good Neighbor Awards. Deadline is May 10. Find out more at realtorm.ag/gna.

Thank you, judges

Martin Edwards NAR Past President | **Shannon L. King** NAR Member Communications Chair | **Vince Malta** NAR First Vice President | **Veronica C. Malolos** NAR Housing Opportunities Chair | **Stacey Moncrieff** Vice President, NAR Business Communications & Publishing | **Suzanne Mueller** SVP of Industry Relations, Move Inc. and realtor.com | **Ron Phipps** NAR Past President (and 2001 Good Neighbor Honorable Mention) | **Thomas Riley** NAR Treasurer | **John Smaby** NAR President-elect | **Martin Sundquist** SVP of Customer & Community Programs, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage

Thank you, sponsors

Since 2000, the Good Neighbor Awards has donated more than \$1.1 million to REALTOR®-led charities. Those grants—and REALTOR® Magazine's Good Neighbor program itself—wouldn't be possible without the generous support of its sponsors: realtor.com® and Wells Fargo.

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Are you a Good Neighbor?

Or do you know someone who should be nominated? Visit nar.realtor/gna to nominate someone for the 2019 awards (deadline for entries: May 10) or to contribute to current and past winners' charities.



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