

# REALTOR

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## Home on the Ranch

Good Neighbor Award Winner Joy Nelson



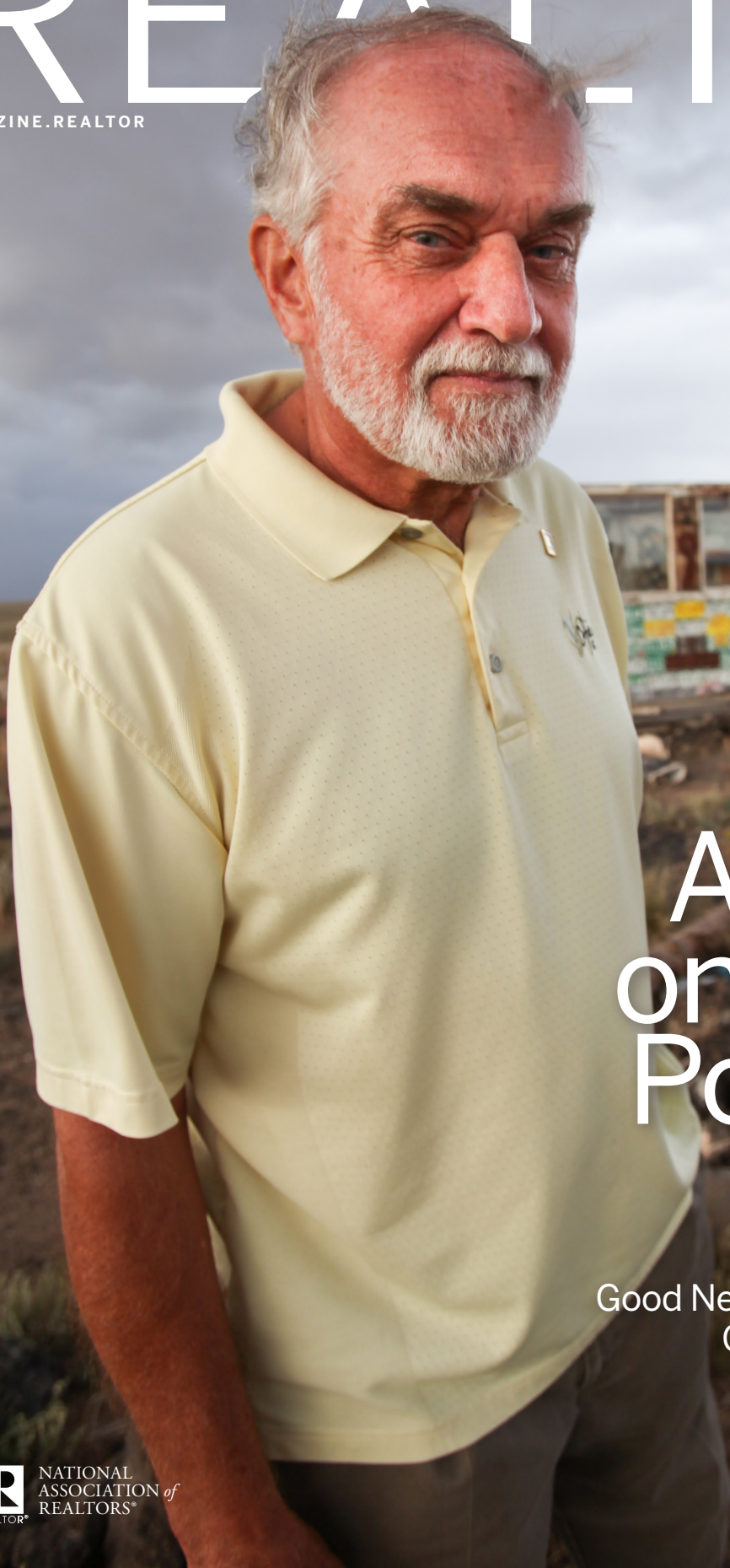
NATIONAL  
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THE BUSINESS TOOL FOR REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2018

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## A Grip on Rural Poverty

Good Neighbor Award Winner  
Chet Choman



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# 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](http://nar.realtor/gna).**



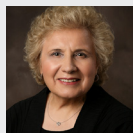
**Omayra Borges** jumped in to save lives after Puerto Rico's storm. **Page 4**



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

## Honorable Mentions

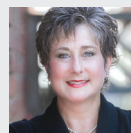
From hundreds of nominations, we selected five more REALTORS® who make a difference through passionate volunteer work. They will each receive \$2,500 grants for their charities. Read their full profiles at [realtorm.ag/hon-mentions](http://realtorm.ag/hon-mentions).



**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®.

# JOY NELSON

WATERTOWN, S.D. | HAUGAN NELSON REALTY | REALTOR® FOR 31 YEARS



“The cancer camp is amazing. The kids have so much fun, they don’t even remember they’re ill.”



# Home on the Ranch

Joy Nelson founded a 126-acre magical respite that lives up to its name. BY FREDERIK HELLER

The girl, just 5 years old, was recovering from sexual abuse and wouldn't say a word during her usual counseling sessions. But after three sessions communing with horses in an equine therapy program, "she just opened up," says REALTOR® Joy Nelson. "She's such a confident little girl now. It's really amazing to see."

For Nelson, founder of Joy Ranch in Watertown, S.D., which operates the equine therapy program known as Hope, Healing, and Horses, it's one of countless examples of how powerful the connection between animals and people can be. "I believe in the healing power of horses. They're so intuitive, and somewhat spiritual," she says. "I've been around them so long, I can tell when that horse-human connection happens. That horse will hook onto that person and just kind of take care of them."

"Horses don't judge," says Mark Dunn, whose son Lincoln, 11, has spina bifida and participates in equine activities at the ranch. "They don't see a kid with special needs; they see a child. You can feel the connection right away."

## A Barrier-Free Western Town

"Magical" is the word most people use to describe Joy Ranch. The 126-acre ranch, in a community of about 22,000, was built to be completely ADA-accessible, including the riding arena and paths to a nearby lake. "We talked to folks with various disabilities and compiled all the barriers they run into when trying to go places, and then we built that all into the design before we put a shovel in the ground," says Nelson. Now Joy Ranch often hosts

people with physical disabilities, veterans suffering from PTSD, nursing home residents, and others with special needs.

Beyond therapy, the ranch serves as a place for fun. "We do archery, go tubing, and have inspirational bonfires every night. We have yoga and drama," says Marilee Kontz, children's camp coordinator at Sanford Health Medical Center, who brings children with spina bifida and cancer to the ranch each year. "This year, we added an escape room adapted for children with wheelchairs, and that's been one of their favorite things."

The owner and president of Hagan Nelson Realty in Watertown, Nelson purchased the first 100 acres in 1989 to raise show horses. But she quickly saw her land and animals could fill a need, as churches, Special Olympics, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters approached her to use the space. "Soon, it wasn't just a few rides now and then. It got to be on a much grander scale," Nelson recalls. "I knew there was so much more we could do."

In 2002, Nelson donated the property to Lutherans Outdoors and partnered with the Watertown Area Community Foundation to facilitate donations. Since then, Nelson has donated more than \$3 million to Joy Ranch and raised millions more. The ranch offers scholarships and pays for doctors, nurses, and caregivers to accompany children with disabilities on visits. Several colleges bring nursing and physical therapy students to Joy Ranch for training. In addition, the camp employs counselors who have physical, developmental, and intellectual disabilities.

Nelson still lives on the ranch and remains deeply involved in daily operations. She also sits on the boards of at least 10 other local organizations and was instrumental in starting Watertown Artwalk to help revitalize the downtown area. "Joy is always present," says Dunn. "She wants to see Watertown do well, and truly believes in the goodness in each person in our community." Finding the time for business and volunteer work can be challenging. "It's a balancing act for sure," Nelson says. But her dedication to helping others is a reflection of her approach to life. "The three things we crave most in life are happiness, freedom, and peace of mind. I believe the way to attain those things is to give them away to someone else."



## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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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