

News Release
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Marsha Smith Receives Housing Leadership Award

NORTHWEST LOWER, MI – Marsha Smith, a long-time supporter of local housing initiatives, was recognized with the Northwest Michigan Housing Leadership Award at the 2019 Northwest Michigan Housing Summit October 18 in Traverse City.

The Housing Leadership Award highlights the contributions of individuals in Northwest Lower Michigan who have made positive, significant contributions to housing for all residents. The award is for individuals who have:

- Made important contributions to the region's housing choices.
- Increased the understanding and awareness of housing needs.
- Led efforts resulting in significant economic, social, and/or political impacts in the community that had encouraged housing choices for all.

Smith, the previous Executive Director of Rotary Charities and Rotary Camps & Services of Traverse City, was recognized for her work as a champion and supporter of housing initiatives for over twenty years. Under her leadership, Rotary Charities awarded over 43 grants to support housing activities, totaling over \$1.3 million over the last twenty years. These grants paved the way for new systems, organizations, programs, and research around housing, making Northwest Michigan a leader among rural regions in terms of its coordinated housing programs and initiatives. Housing needs assessments funded by Rotary led to the creation of Homestretch, which was formed with Rotary support, and has gone on to build dozens of affordable homes. Smith's leadership also helped lay the foundation for an initiative known as Community Housing Choices, a first step towards advocating for sound local housing policies among local governments, the public, and developers. Community Housing Choices evolved over the years into a larger regional conversation that fostered discussions on creating a systems-based approach to addressing housing development barriers. That led to the creation of Housing North, which was launched last year with a multi-year commitment from Rotary Charities.

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Sarah Lucas, Executive Director of Housing North, presented the award to Smith. “Marsha was a strong voice and presence, ensuring that housing - not always a popular or well-understood issue - was always on the agenda,” said Lucas. “Her influence and support have led the way to big-picture, collaborative, system-wide solutions. Marsha’s vision and belief in “a better way” has led to a deep understanding of housing issues in our region, a will to solve them, and resources for solutions.”

The Northwest Michigan Housing Summit, an annual event coordinated by Networks Northwest and Housing North, provides opportunities to network, learn, and build solutions for housing choices in Northwest Michigan. Over 200 people, representing banks, private sector real estate and development, housing and health organizations, local governments, and statewide organizations attended the event. Summit topics included development tools, land banks and land conservancy tools, housing communications, statewide trends and policy initiatives, and an updated market analysis. Speakers included Aaron Miripol from the Urban Land Conservancy in Denver, Colorado; Sharon Woods from LandUse USA; David Allen from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority; Shannon Morgan and Jill Ferrari of Renovare Development; Jim Tischler of the Michigan Land Bank Authority; Woody Smith of Avenue ISR, and more.

For more information on the Housing Summit, including presentations and materials, please visit www.nwm.org/housingsummit.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by e-mailing Dan Boss at dan.boss@networksnorthwest.org and stating preferences for resolution (300 dpi?), file format (.tif? .jpg?) and file size (1MB or less?). Or, phone (231) 929-5047. Check our online Media Room at: networksnorthwest.org/media

Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10 county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works, Small Business Development Center, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities’ requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our web site, networksnorthwest.org

Networks Northwest's member counties are: Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.