

PRESS RELEASE

50 Valley Street, Providence, RI 02909-2459
(401) 444.0600 | fax (401) 444.0635
www.LIVEUNITEDri.org



Contact: Michael J. Cerio | michael@ceriocommunications.com | (401) 743-8269

United Way Honors Community Champions During Special Celebration

Barbara Papitto, Sandra and Kenneth Pattie, and Maryclaire Knight are recognized for helping to create lasting change in our communities

Providence, R.I. (June 10, 2022) — During a special celebration on Thursday, June 9, United Way of Rhode Island honored a slate of community champions for their commitment to creating change in our communities and for their philanthropy. Recognized were Barbara Papitto, Sandra and Kenneth Pattie, and Maryclaire Knight.

“One of the most powerful attributes of a state the size of Rhode Island is the magnitude of the direct impact that philanthropy and volunteerism can have in our communities,” said Cortney Nicolato, United Way’s president and CEO. “Every single one of us can help to make a positive difference in our own way, and each of this year’s honorees has set an example we all can follow. There’s no doubt our state is better as a result of their selfless contributions.”

The recipient of United Way’s Changemaker Award, Barbara Papitto is the founder and a trustee of the Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC). The POC is a nonprofit foundation dedicated to working with Rhode Island’s Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities to empower and create individual success stories by investing in education, job skills training, and entrepreneurial ventures. Barbara founded the POC in December 2020 and since, the foundation has invested tens of millions of dollars in local organizations and programs. The POC is the continuation of the commitment she and her late husband, Ralph, made to creating educational opportunities for local children impacted by systemic racial injustice. To help improve reading skills among inner-city students, the couple founded Read to Succeed in 2008. The program offers youth the incentive of a \$1,000 college scholarship each summer for six years for reading while school is out. Since Read to Succeed began, it has funded \$2.2 million in scholarships.

Bestowed the highest honor presented by United Way, Sandra and Kenneth Pattie were presented with the organization’s Tocqueville United Award. The award, named after historian Alexis de Tocqueville for his work to create social equality, recognizes philanthropists who give \$10,000 or more annually. Sandra, who retired in 2021 after more than three decades at BankNewport and having been the bank’s first female president, first became involved with United Way in the mid-1980s. She volunteered on the Allocation Committee, later joining the Human Resources Committee and then the Board of Directors, where she served as chair from 2014-2016. Ken dedicated his career to information and technology, retiring in 2006 as a faculty member of New England Institute of Technology. The couple focuses their philanthropy on organizations that support basic human needs and special needs individuals.

Maryclaire Knight is the recipient of the Women United Award, recognizing her commitment to early childhood education and improving the reading proficiency of our state’s youngest students. Maryclaire began her career as an educator focused on children with special needs, and then led the River Street School, an alternative high school in Hyde Park, MA, before becoming a senior executive responsible for three YMCA branches in Massachusetts. Today, Maryclaire operates a successful consulting practice that spans program design, delivery, assessment, and evaluation, along with executive coaching and strategic planning supports. Much of her work focuses on ensuring that local children are able to access high-quality experiential learning opportunities.

###

United Way of Rhode Island is uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. A member of the world's largest nonprofit network, we bring together individuals, businesses, nonprofits, community leaders, and government to tackle the root causes of inequity and achieve specific, measurable goals. Our programs include 211, the statewide front door connecting Rhode Islanders with social services, resources, and vital programs. Both directly and through grants to nonprofits, we are investing to build economic opportunity, advance childhood learning, expand philanthropy, and drive policy and participation. To learn more, visit unitedwayri.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Twitter](#).