



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**UNITED COMMUNITY'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY HOMECOMING
UNDERScores THE POWER OF COMMUNITY**



From Left to right: Board Member Tom Curcio, Former Mt. Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland, Board Chair Ken Disselkoen, Former Executive Director Sharon Kelso, Board Member Lisa Jones, Executive Director Alison DeCoursey, and Board Member Elin Bohn

Alexandria, VA (October 22, 2019) – On Saturday, October 19, 2019, United Community celebrated its 50th Anniversary Homecoming with nearly 200 people joining the festivities at the Mount Vernon Country Club. Attendees included the organization's current and past board members, staff, partners, donors volunteers, elected and county leaders and, most importantly, community residents.

The evening's theme, *Honoring Our Past, Embracing our Future*, was headlined by keynote speaker Sharon Kelso – a beloved, high-power woman who led United Community for more than 25 years. The former executive director was awarded the Gerald W. Hyland Humanitarian Award from the award's namesake – Kelso's dear friend and former Mt Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland. Kelso, now 80 years-old,

travelled from Las Vegas to Alexandria to be among friends, reminisce, and support United Community's aspiration of ending multigenerational poverty in southeastern Fairfax County.

"I'm so grateful to all of you for being such an integral part of this organization and of my life," Kelso said. "It's because of your support that this organization is celebrating 50 years today. And through your legacy, it'll be here for many years to come."

"As an agency, our path forward is clear," Alison DeCoursey, United Community's current executive director shared with the guests. "While we will continue to give direct aid, United Community can and will disrupt the systems that institutionalize poverty in our region."

DeCoursey outlined upcoming efforts to connect those in need with key influencers in Fairfax County, through the organization's Communities of Opportunity initiative. The goal is to increase collaboration among government leaders, schools, nonprofits and community members to identify and resolve systemic obstacles for those in need.

"For the first time, United Community will work to identify, isolate and eliminate systems that crush the dreams and aspirations of talented and ambitious people and leave them struggling just to survive.

Guests also heard from United Community neighborhood ambassador and board member Lisa Jones. Now a resident of the Creekside community, Jones shared her story of how she and her daughter overcame homelessness with help from United Community and other human services organizations in the county. Jones expressed confidence that even though many residents face financial difficulties, their hope and dreams are stronger – and with just a little help from the community, they can shake the pull of poverty.

"The power of Community is knowing that someone cares about you, is empathetic to your needs, and is truly contributing to your self-sufficiency," Jones explained. "That's what sets United Community apart."

About United Community (formerly United Community Ministries)

United Community envisions a community where everyone thrives. United Community empowers our neighbors in need to transform their lives through wrap-around programs and services that support children, youth, and families in southeastern Fairfax County. For 50 years, United Community has been advocating for, supporting, and serving low-income residents in Northern Virginia. Learn more at unitedcommunity.org

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