

2019 Friend of Housing Awards honor state's housing champions

October 4, 2019 (SEATTLE) — The Washington State Housing Finance Commission has honored seven individuals and organizations as 2019 “Friends of Housing.”

The awardees from across the state ensure affordable homes and support services for thousands of Washington residents. They also work toward funding, policies and programs to ensure affordable housing into the future.

“We are proud to honor those who have dedicated their careers to creating and preserving affordable homes for everyone,” said Karen Miller, chair of the Housing Finance Commission. “This year’s awardees are truly inspiring.”

The awards were presented October 1 in a ceremony at the annual [Housing Washington conference](#) in Spokane.



L-R: Julie Honekamp, Fallon Santoro (daughter of Chris Santoro), Rob Van Tassell, Charlette Riley (Bremerton Housing Authority), Nathan Gorton, Carol Zborowski (Bremerton Housing Authority), Sam Green of ROC Northwest, Sara Van Cleeve (Bremerton Housing Authority). Not pictured: Estela Ortega.

Photo: Brianne Smith. Individual photos available.

2019 Friend of Housing Awardees:

- **Chris Santoro:** Chris, who passed away earlier this year, was recognized posthumously for 40 years in the affordable housing industry, most recently with private developer AVS Communities. He helped to build thousands of affordable apartments with a focus on tenant satisfaction, including access to transportation and a holistic range of opportunities for success in day-to-day living.
- **Nathan Gorton:** As Washington REALTORS Government Affairs Director, Nathan Gorton coordinated the successful “Unlock the Door to Affordable Homeownership” campaign in the 2019 state legislative session. He led a coalition of non- and for-profit volunteers, procured almost \$1 million in grant money, and ensured the message reached far and wide among legislators.
- **Bremerton Housing Authority Community Connections Team:** This team of three women—Carol Zborowski, Tasha Walton, and Charlette Riley—enhance the lives of BHA residents in Kitsap County through programs that promote self-sufficiency and offer senior supportive services, skill-building classes, wellness and safety, and more.
- **ROC Northwest:** Resident-Owned Communities (ROC) Northwest’s mission is to empower manufacture-home community residents by empowering them to form a cooperative and purchase the land under their homes. In the last decade, ROC Northwest has helped convert 15 manufactured-housing communities into resident-owned communities, assisting approximately 676 households.
- **Rob Van Tassell:** As vice president of Catholic Housing Services of Western Washington, Rob Van Tassell has led or been involved in the development of 14 projects serving nearly 10,000 residents. He has shown exemplary leadership beyond his organization, especially focusing on empowering marginalized communities through his work on the Communities of Concern Commission.
- **Estela Ortega:** As executive director of El Centro de la Raza, Estela recognized the importance of affordable housing to communities of color. She educated and organized her staff to raise more than \$45

million to build and operate the award-winning Plaza Roberto Maestas on Beacon Hill, with 112 affordable apartments plus community, retail, and office space next to light rail.

- **Julie Honekamp:** Chief executive officer of the Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners (SNAP), Julie Honekamp leads the organization in serving more than 45,000 neighbors a year through home weatherization, energy assistance, homeownership counseling, and transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing.

The annual [Friends of Housing Awards](#) are presented to people or organizations who have made exceptional contributions to creating or supporting affordable housing, including solving housing problems, creating innovative financing, or drafting housing legislation or policies.

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The [Washington State Housing Finance Commission](#) is a publicly accountable, self-supporting team that brings private investment dollars to benefit families and achieve public goals throughout Washington.

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