

## CREATING CHANGE

### Nonprofit Community Teamwork Inc. hosts upcoming recognition event

## CHAMPIONS OF COMMUNITY ACTION

**By Cameron Morsberger**

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**LOWELL »** A handful of local community advocates will be honored as Champions of Community Action for their work creating important change in the city at a Community Teamwork Inc. event next week.

Aleksandra and Bobby Tugbiyele, a Lowell couple who promote and support diversity, equity and inclusion, and Bill Lipchitz, a devoted Lowellian involved with a number of organizations, will each be recognized for their individual work at Community Teamwork Inc. and in the city. Jim and Pam Houlares, residents of South Natick, are also recipients of the award.

The honorees will gather at Dracut's Four Oaks Country Club from 6 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, May 26, to be acknowledged for their achievements in community building. Aleksandra Tugbiyele is a CTI board of trustees member and representative for Lowell City Councilor John Drinkwater, as well as an avid fundraiser for Jumpstart for Young Children, a nonprofit literacy program, and other charities.

As a member of the DEI Consortium- Lowell, Aleksandra Tugbiyele said that, in order to make change, one needs to foster relationships and connections in one's neighborhood.

Coming from a family of bluecollar workers, she said she was taught to engage with her community and ensure that everyone's voice is heard. Receiving this award, she said, came "completely by surprise," but she is thankful for it.

"My parents were always really engaged in talking about the importance of being connected in the community and advocating especially as Black people and people of Native American heritage," Aleksandra Tugbiyele said. "When we got the update from the team that they wanted to honor us

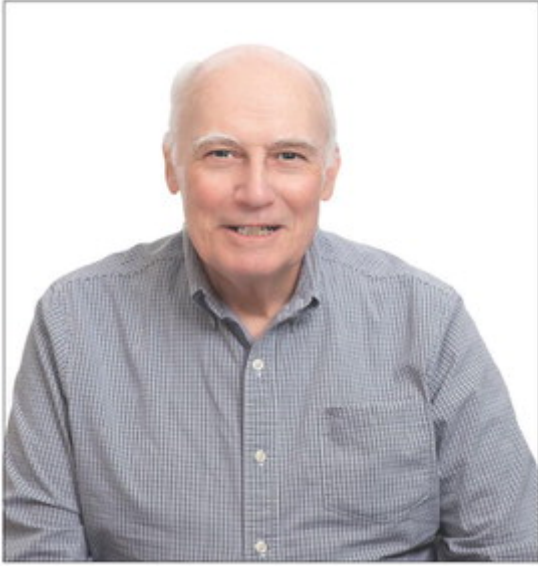
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**HONORS » PAGE 8**



Aleksandra and Bobby Tugbiyele, Lowell DEI and community advocates, will be honored as Champions of Community Action at a Community Teamwork event next week.

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Bill Lipchitz, who has worked with Community Teamwork for 51 years, will be recognized for his decades of service as a Champion of Community Action at a ceremony next week.

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## Honors

### FROM PAGE 1

‘ I remember thinking, ‘ Oh geez, we’re just doing what we’re supposed to do.’” Bobby Tugbiyele, founder and CEO of health care recruiting firm The Leap Network, worked in CTI’s career services department, where he provided low- income, marginalized people with career advice and counseling.

He continues to work in spaces across Lowell, including at Lowell General Hospital and UMass Lowell, his and his wife’s alma mater, and placed fourth in the race for City Council atlarge last year. To be honored with an award for his service to the community is surprising, Bobby Tugbiyele said, and he hopes his work speaks for itself.

“It’s hard to put into words how I personally felt when we were informed that we were going to be honored in this capacity, because you’re not doing this work, you’re not speaking up, you’re not advocating, you’re not trying to respectfully challenge mindsets, you’re not doing all of this for titles,” Tugbiyele said. “ You’re doing this because it impacts the lives of those around you.”

CTI is a nonprofit organization that supplies educational, economic and housing opportunities for people in need, partnering with anti-poverty organizations to provide important resources to communities across the region.

Karen Frederick, CEO of Community Teamwork, said the Tugbiyeles are “deeply rooted in our community” and have been successful in identifying and solving many needs in Lowell. In selecting this year’s awardees, Frederick said it was quite easy to decide to honor Aleksandra and Bobby Tugbiyele because, in short, they are “a power couple.”

“ We really wanted to look at people who display the community action spirit and that’s identifying issues and then helping to solve them,” Frederick said. “ Our roots in community action are in helping people move from poverty, out of poverty and to stay out of poverty, and also our roots are in the civil rights movement, so equity is a huge underpinning for our work. And so this year, it was really easy to come up with our honorees.”

Lipchitz recently celebrated his 51st year with CTI, having first joined as a community planner in the early 1970s. He then became the director of planning and development, a “one-man operation” and stuck with the organization ever since.

Lipchitz oversaw the 2013 creation of CTI’s Common Ground Development Corporation, an affordable housing program that he continues to support. They have built a total of 51 units of housing in Westford’s Stony Brook neighborhood and multiple units in Acton’s former high school.

Of the award, Lipchitz said he is proud of what he has achieved over the last 50 years but is nevertheless surprised to receive this accolade.

“ I know I’ve been there for a long time, and I know that, internally, they value what I do. It’s nice to be recognized,” Lipchitz said. “Action is all about what we can do, either individually or collectively, to make the community more economically viable for all. For low- income people to prosper, the whole community needs to prosper.”

Pam and Jim Houlares will receive an award for their work as early education philanthropists. Pam Houlares spent 37 years as an educator and later a school principal, while her husband Jim worked for several decades as CTI’s education coordinator at Head Start, a program that provides educational resources and support for young, low-income children.

With two children and four grandchildren, the Houlareses said they will continue to work to shape the future of their children and those in their community.

“ It’s so essential that we leave a positive and productive future for all children and families. We’re both very strongly about that,” Pam Houlares said. “ It’s really the essence of what we do, at the heart of what we do, and to this day, children are essential.”

Frederick said she is looking forward to bringing all honorees together to highlight their achievements and impacts on Lowell and beyond.

“ We’re very excited to honor these folks,” Frederick said. “ We think they are just shining examples of community action in action.”

Tickets to CTI’s event next week are available at [https:// bit.ly/3MkemHx](https://bit.ly/3MkemHx).



South Natick residents Pam and Jim Houlares are early education philanthropists who will be honored at Community Teamwork’s Champions of Community Action event next week.

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