

## Community Teamwork celebrates 60 years of community action

Peter Currier – Lowell Sun—5 9 24



Community Teamwork CEO Karen Frederick speaks to the nonprofit's staff during a recent "All Staff Day" that was held to commemorate 60 years of community action both locally and nationwide. (Courtesy Community Teamwork)



Hundreds of Community Teamwork staff gathered recently for an "All Staff Day" that was held to commemorate 60 years of community action both locally and nationwide. (Courtesy Community Teamwork)

**LOWELL** — It is a month of celebration for Community Teamwork with May being Community Action Month as the agency prepares to celebrate 60 years since the establishment of the Community Action Network.

Community Teamwork Inc. got started in 1965, the year after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act into law as part of what was called the War on Poverty

conducted through Johnson's "Great Society" campaign. In six decades, the organization has evolved with the times, but the core mission of offering services and programs related to housing, education and early childhood care have remained largely the same.

"Community Action Agencies are at the heart of their communities and offer critical services and support to those who need it most," CTI CEO Karen Frederick said in a May 1 statement. "Our work is centered on helping families achieve economic stability, education, affordable housing, and overall well-being. This month we honor our past while looking ahead to a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive."

As part of the celebrations, CTI will have its Champions of Community Action event on May 23 at the Four Oaks Country Club in Dracut, starting at 6 p.m.

The celebration will serve as a fundraiser to help fight against homelessness. At the event, five champions of community action will be honored for their work within their respective communities. They include Chelmsford Town Manager Paul Cohen, Lowell City Manager Tom Golden, outgoing Northern Middlesex District Register of Deeds Richard Howe, UMass Lowell Associate Dean Sue Kim and local community advocate Vladimir Saldana.

"These are people who have really stepped up in their communities and made a difference," said CTI board member Marie Sweeney.

Sweeney has been on the board since 1992. In her more than 30 years with the organization, she said there has been a great deal of change, even though the overall mission has stayed mostly the same.

"I've seen it change. I've seen what has been done to improve the community, but I've also seen how history can repeat itself. We didn't always do housing to the extent that we do now, but we had always been involved in education and early childhood care," said Sweeney. "The biggest difference locally is that there is a real partnership between the government and Community Teamwork, when it had been a little more adversarial in the past."

The nonprofit began as a community advocacy group, providing job training, early childhood education, nutrition programs and elderly volunteer activities within Greater Lowell. As the group grew, they would add services like fuel assistance, weatherizing homes to lower maintenance costs, affordable housing programs and shelters for the homeless.

Another change, Sweeney said, has been a greater level of collaboration between nonprofits when it comes to grant funding.

"The big change, to me, is the collaboration with the city government and other nonprofits. When there was money out there for grants, there was a time when it was very competitive, but now it is a lot more collaborative," said Sweeney. "Community Teamwork might take the lead on one grant, while the Coalition for a Better Acre may take the lead on another."

With more than 600 employees, Community Teamwork serves more than 55,000 individuals in 74 cities and towns in Massachusetts, largely within the Merrimack Valley.