

Remarks

- The 2024 NeighborWorks Founders Award recipient is Stuart J. Mitchell III, CEO Emeritus of PathStone Corporation in Rochester, New York.
- Stuart Mitchell has devoted his life to equity, fairness, and opportunity. He is courageous and relentless in his pursuit of racial equality and pathways out of poverty.
- As a college student in 1965, Stuart volunteered with the Fayette County Tennessee Civil Rights Project. He traveled to a very rural community 80 miles north of Memphis. There, he helped sharecroppers to register to vote, and was part of several successful efforts to desegregate lunch counters and schools. The experience set the direction for his life's work.
- Stuart helped to establish PathStone in 1969, and went on to lead the organization for over 50 years. Under his leadership, PathStone grew from a grassroots effort to assist farmworkers in Western New York, to become a national leader in affordable housing and homeownership, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and community-led community development.
- When Stuart was named president and CEO in 1977, PathStone's budget was \$3 million. By the time he stepped down, the budget exceeded \$100 million, operated 12 different lines of business, employed close to 600 people, and worked in seven states—New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Virginia—and in the commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The organization serves tens of thousands of people annually.
- A visionary leader, Stuart hired extraordinary people who were as passionate as he was, and he supported and trusted them. An ordained Methodist minister, he has deep faith in the betterment of communities. His bottom line was always: how will this activity build assets for people and communities?
- PathStone grew by affiliating small organizations in different states anchored in economic and workforce development. From its beginning, the PathStone board, and the boards of its affiliates, were comprised of at least 51% agricultural workers—PathStone's core customers—not as token representatives, but as engaged leaders of the corporation.
- It was at the insistence of the board that PathStone expanded to Puerto Rico, where they built the island's first HUD 202 project for people with disabilities – one of many firsts there.
- PathStone began to provide housing services in 1982. Stuart was determined that resources be directed to rural housing projects, regardless of how long it took. When the tax credit program first began, those projects often favored urban and suburban housing that could be built on a larger scale. Stuart kept emphasizing the need for rural. There were others who would do suburban and urban.
- Stuart always had big ideas and would not be deterred by obstacles. He often said "If it was easy, the for-profits would be doing it."

- His partnership-building skills are legendary. When Stuart entered NeighborWorks America’s Achieving Excellence Program in 2005, he and a fellow student, a leader of a Rochester-based nonprofit affordable housing developer, decided their capstone project would be a merger. That merger catapulted PathStone to become one of the premier housing developers in New York state.
- The 2013 affiliation with the Housing Council, one of New York’s largest HUD-approved housing counseling agencies, established PathStone as a national leader in homeownership, and brought Alex Castro to the organization, who has succeeded Stuart as president and CEO.
- Stuart was an active member of NeighborWorks America’s REDI National Advisory Committee and in 2015, became co-chair of the Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative Housing Work Group, one of many local leadership roles. He continues to serve his community as a senior advisor to the Rochester schools. His devotion to issues of race, equity, diversity, and inclusion has bookended his career.
- As a colleague wrote “When people meet Stuart, they walk away feeling that they just spent time with someone whose kindness is genuine, who is humble and self-effacing, and who is loving by nature.”
- Visionary, trailblazer, collaborator, leader, minister, and warrior—please join me in congratulating Stuart J. Mitchell III as the recipient of the 2024 NeighborWorks Founders Award.