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# The Berkshire 25 of 2016

## The Most Dedicated, Most Creative, Most Influential of the Berkshires



We have among us a great diversity of talented and community-driven people. They contribute their time, skills, and resources to improve this corner of our humble paradise. They touch upon the various elements of the Berkshires that make us unique, and they work to improve and enhance our home and its diverse features—protected lands, schools, healthcare, business, fine arts, security, and more. This is our third year of honoring this select group of individuals. With the help of a panel of advisors, we proudly present The Berkshire 25.



**Eve Schatz** exemplifies the motto “the pen is mightier than the sword,” wielding her words to redress injustices inflicted on



the disenfranchised or anyone who cannot pay full attorney fees. Schatz, who worked on behalf of patients' rights legislation and brought a polluter into compliance with DEP regulations in Great Barrington, quickly realized that to become an attorney would ready her to understand how the system works thereby rendering her a more effective advocate in the public interest arena. She is founder and director of the Berkshire Center for Justice, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary and is the only law firm in the area offering sliding-scale direct legal services and weekly free legal clinics.

**Jean K. Poopor** is an active member of the Dalton Beautification Association, the Council on Aging, and the Life Group at the Craneville Place Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Facility. When she is not working to better the community, she cares for an aged parent in her home and enjoys grand-parenting her eight wonderful grandchildren. This former teacher at Capeless Elementary School in Pittsfield is truly a great role model for every generation.



**Gwendolyn Hampton VanSant** is CEO and co-founding director of Multicultural BRIDGE, an organization that, using the strengths of our Berkshire community, works to promote cultural humility and competence and to educate communities to overcome bias and barriers. BRIDGE offers many services, including a Women to Women Project, positive education and leadership programs for youth, and facilitated community conversations working towards social and racial justice. Hampton VanSant, an expert in diversity leadership and cultural understanding, curates trainings, workshops, and programs that have helped unify the Berkshire area and our neighbors beyond. She is also director of equity and inclusion at Bard College at Simon's Rock, her alma mater.

**Joseph Thompson** has unwaveringly led MASS MoCA since its inception in 1987, making it a creative powerhouse that embraces music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and boundary-crossing works. Thompson, an avid pilot, came to the Berkshires from Oklahoma via Williams College, assuming (having never visited) that because it was Massachusetts, it was near the water. Thankfully, he was misinformed.



**Barry Shapiro** has shown his true love for the Berkshires through his leadership roles. He serves as chairman of the Dr. Robert C. & Tina Sohn Foundation, which makes grants to many Berkshire organizations, and as a director of The Viscardi Center, the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, the New Marlborough Village Association, and public TV station WNET. He is an active board member of Shakespeare & Co. and served as a director of Volunteers in Medicine, Project Native, and the Flying Cloud Institute.

**Cheryl Thomson** is program manager of Advocacy for Access at Fairview Hospital, where she dedicates her time providing a chance for all. The program works to make health insurance accessible and possible for all clients. Referred to as the “go-to person for any and all health-related questions,” Thomson’s hard work benefits every needy patient who enters the hospital.



**Betsy Andrus**, executive director of the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, is a tremendous contributor to the Great Barrington community. She has spent countless hours volunteering for local efforts including those of the rotary club’s Bike-N-Fly, Great Barrington Heritage Day, Historical Society, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and more. In addition, Andrus is co-chair of the Great Barrington’s 250th Committee, the Parking Task Force, and the Place Making Committee. She has served on the board of the Berkshire Co-Op Market for the past seven years.

**Michael J. Wynn** is well known in the community as the Pittsfield police chief whose leadership qualities are accompanied by hard work, dedication, and respect. His commitment to law enforcement exceeds 20 years during which he has positively

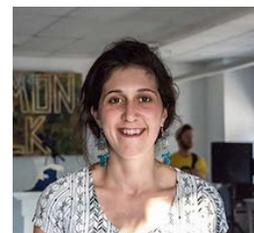
influenced the lives of many. His efforts include conducting courses in leadership, management, and defense, and he has been tireless in protecting Pittsfield's 44,000-plus citizens.



**Janis Broderick** is the executive director of an essential community organization, the Elizabeth Freeman Center, which offers free and confidential counseling, shelter, legal advocacy, safety planning, teen-dating violence-prevention education, a 24/7 hotline, and much more. Broderick dedicates herself to the organization that annually reaches over 5,000 people in the Berkshires. Her community dedication is unwavering and distinguished.



**Jess Sweeney** tirelessly devotes her time and effort to shaping youth through her work in the community. She is executive director of the new ROOTS Teen Center, director/founder of Common Folk Artist Collective, and formerly program associate for UNITY Youth Development and Northern Berkshire Neighbors at Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. Sweeney (MCLA class of 2011) continues to empower those in the community to express their skills, passions, opinions, and creativity. She provides opportunities for young people's voices to be heard and valued in north county.



**Jane Burke** is an innovative educator who founded Flying Cloud Institute 32 years ago. The institute provides opportunities for girls and young women to engage and become excited about STEAM; science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics. Burke also is passionate about teaching science, math, and chemistry through art, a practice of hers that she has brought to the Berkshire community high schools. At 71, she is stepping down from Flying Cloud and will spend more time in local classrooms.

**Cara Davis** arrived at Construct, Inc., in 1989 with a vision for comprehensive transitional shelter programs geared toward the homeless or people in need, and proceeded to launch a range of integrated services designed to deliver immediate emergency aid and long-term self-sufficiency, utilizing the clients themselves as her teachers. After devoting 27 years of her life to affordable housing, Davis will retire as executive director at the end



of this year.



**Leslie Reed-Evans** has been executive director of the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation for 22 of its 30 years, and her love for the earth stems from childhood experiences at her grandfather's New York farm. A steward of Berkshire's open spaces, Reed-Evans seeks to inspire a well-informed sense of compassion for our resources by leading creative educational programs.

**Kelley Vickery** is founder and director of the Berkshire International Film Festival (BIFF), in its 12th year. BIFF has grown to be a world-class festival attracting all sorts of filmmakers and industry professionals. From independent features to documentaries to shorts, with panels and special events, BIFF offers it all. Many sponsors are local, connecting the community even more. Vickery has created an artistic and cultural space for collaboration.



**Ty Allan Jackson** founded Big Head Books, an organization that emphasizes the importance of literacy for children and adults. He has received the inaugural Dr. Martin Luther King Content of Character Award and citations from the governor and the state's House of Representatives for his dedication to promoting literacy. He is also co-founder of the F.U.L.L. Program, which unites incarcerated parents with their children through

literature.

**Becky and Caleb Miner** have a knack for making sure every client leaves the gym smiling and sweating. The husband-and-wife team, inspired by their own weight-loss journeys, boast a wide variety of high-energy, effective classes. They also organize the annual Dancing in the Street festival in North Adams, host family-friendly movie nights, and offer haircuts for kids—keeping the community looking and feeling good.



**Hilda Banks Shapiro**, a Housatonic resident, is an award-winning writer, outstanding pianist, devoted mother of 12, and an active member of the community. At age 89,



she remains engaged in activities and always looking forward to something new. Her spirit, kindness, and tenacity are certainly award-worthy.

**Ben Downing** represents 52 communities of the Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden District in the Massachusetts senate—the largest geographical district in the Commonwealth. Downing, who is vacating his Senate seat this year, also serves as the Senate chairman of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy and as vice-chairman of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development.



**Kathy Keeser** is making a change for the homeless in the northern Berkshires. She is executive director of Louison House, which provides temporary and permanent housing solutions. Over the past 26 years, the nonprofit organization has provided services to over 3,500 individuals. She has also served on the Hoosac Harvest board and the North Adams Farmers Market board. Keeser is an individual with immense passion to rally others together to make change.

**Ed Sedarbaum** of Williamstown is known for his tireless work promoting LGBTQ Senior awareness. He runs the Berkshires Rainbow Seniors, which is dedicated to creating safe spaces for members of the LGBTQ senior community. In addition, he made a big splash this year when he spoke at Pittsfield's Park Square at the vigil for the 49 victims gunned down in Orlando. Community members would agree that Sedarbaum's passion and determination has had a positive impact on area residents.



**Jay Anderson** is CEO of Pittsfield Cooperative Bank. His extensive knowledge has secured him as president of the board of Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation (PERC) for the past 12 years. He focuses on PERC's executive, loan, and technical-assistance committees. He also has leadership positions with Berkshire Health Systems, Berkshire Housing Authority Development Corp., and Berkshire Place.



**Alice Boyd**, who is the selectwoman of Sandisfield, could be the town's true unsung hero. Boyd stepped in and provided a steady hand for her community by stabilizing both the political and financial elements of Sandisfield. She has secured many grants, worked with Kinder Morgan (pipeline) and WiredWest (broadband), completed an electrical-aggregation process, and evaluated the town finances.



**Nina Garlington** has been the director of development at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield for four years. In this position and in former development capacities for Jacob's Pillow Dance, Berkshire Theatre Group, MCLA, and Berkshire United Way, she has helped raised millions of dollars for institutions that are vital to our beloved Berkshires. Her proactive involvement in promoting and connecting social circles in the Berkshires has created a new, inclusive community fabric that transcends traditional geographic, ethnic, socioeconomic, and identity barriers, making Garlington an exemplary community member.

**Tony Pastore**, a decorated World War II veteran, recently received another honor, serving as grand marshal during the 2016 Pittsfield Independence Day Parade. Pastore has held leadership posts within the Disabled American Veterans and is a life member of the Veterans of Foreign War. Today, music is his passion.



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