



M&T Bank, Aspen Institute Announce Recipients of Baltimore City's First Weaver Awards

August 11, 2021

Bank will provide each awardee \$7,000 to support their community-focused projects

BALTIMORE, Aug. 11, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- M&T Bank (NYSE: MTB) and Weave: The Social Fabric Project, a program of the Aspen Institute, have announced winners of the first-ever Weaver Awards celebrating and supporting Baltimore City residents who are helping to build trust and strengthen relationships throughout the city.

M&T, one of Greater Baltimore's most generous corporate givers, will provide each awardee \$7,000 to enhance their grassroots efforts to improve their Baltimore City neighborhoods.

The innovative partnership between M&T and the Aspen Institute is designed to give resources to community leaders who often are overlooked or don't have the time, money or other resources to apply for or earn more traditional grant funding. The program, open only to Baltimore City residents this year, also aims to build a network of so-called "Weavers" who work with other community leaders to address issues such as food insecurity, neighborhood blight, health care access, job skills training and other community needs.

"M&T Bank is focused on bringing together the people and resources necessary to help build a better Baltimore," said Augie Chiasera, M&T's regional president for Greater Baltimore. "Through these awards, we are investing in the people who inspire all of us to be weavers of a strong, inclusive, and equitable community."

Of the 100 Baltimore City residents who applied for a Weaver Award, the following recipients representing several neighborhoods throughout the city were chosen by a 12-member selection committee:

- **Audrey Carter**, of Baltimore's Oliver neighborhood, started the Team-up to Clean-up Project and will use the funds to beautify the community, offer youth stipends, and start a farmers' market to address the fresh food shortage.
- **Reverend Michele Ward**, who leads an association of block captains in the Greenmount West neighborhood, is launching the Lights On Greenmount West campaign to allow 140 homeowners to get solar-powered outdoor lighting for their stoops and back alleys and inspire informal outdoor community gathering.
- **Rocky Brown** leads the Ellwood Park Project, which aims to attract more homeowners to the neighborhood. He will use the award to rehabilitate the park pavilion, resurface the playground and expand sports camps and youth programs.
- **Naimah Sharif** works in the Belair-Edison and West Baltimore neighborhoods through her nonprofit NLife, which creates programs and events to connect people to each other, their neighborhoods and communal celebration to promote social and physical wellness.
- **Aida Medina**, of Highlandtown, leads Gallery Church Baltimore, where she uses her bilingual skills to connect teen moms, newcomers and families in need to free children's clothes, diapers and formula.
- **Elijah Miles**, who works with Tendea Family in McElderry Park, is starting the year-round Tendea's Servant Leaders Program for teens with a paid summer learning institute.
- **Danielle Battle**, of Cherry Hill, founded RICH-Restoring Inner City Hope and will use the award for youth enrichment classes such as woodworking, STEM, conflict resolution, anti-bullying through improvisational comedy, mentoring and photography.
- **Ashley Esposito** works for the State of Maryland and co-founded the Village of Violetville Inc. to connect people and meet neighborhood needs from vaccinations to school supplies to beautification projects and community activities.
- **Geraldine Taylor** and **Arica Gonzalez**, of the Panway neighborhood, work through the Urban Oasis, a community-created organization, and will use the award to support start-up grassroots projects in minority communities.
- **Duane "Shorty" Davis** works throughout Baltimore on his project Good in the Hood, bringing people together at family-friendly events so they can connect and share food and ideas.

Dan Porterfield, CEO of the Aspen Institute, said: "Growing up in Baltimore, I know how much these community Weavers meant in my life. They made us proud and inspired us to look out for each other."

Awardees will work on their projects between now and the end of the year. They'll have regular progress check-ins with staff at the Weave Project, but no formal reports or budgets to submit.

The Weaver Awards selection committee included: Shantell L. Roberts of Touching Young Lives, Inc.; Judeith James of the Alternative Approaches to Mental Health Crisis Center; Ako Changa Onyango of AO Services, Inc.; Krystle Starvis of the Aspen Institute; Antonio Tabora of the Latino Economic Development Center; Hershawna Frison of the Aspen Institute; Brian Gerado of Business Volunteers Maryland; Tanya R. Dorsey of M&T Bank; Nneka Nnamdi of Fight Blight Baltimore; Jim Peterson of M&T Bank; Crickett Woloson of the Elbow Fund; and, Paul E. Taylor of the Baltimore Mayor's Office of Minority and Women Owned Businesses.

Read about the awardees and subscribe to updates on their progress at [Awards.WeAreWeavers.org](https://www.Awards.WeAreWeavers.org).

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About the Aspen Institute's Weave: The Social Fabric Project

[Weave: The Social Fabric Project](#) is a nationwide program of the Aspen Institute that supports and inspires grassroots leaders who are building social trust and weaving an inclusive social fabric so their communities can thrive. Weave supports and strengthens these social weavers by connecting them, offering resources, opening doors to partnerships, and inspiring new generations of weavers. New York Times columnist and author David Brooks founded the project in 2018 and serves as its chair.

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