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**Junior League of Grand Rapids Announces
Annual Community Catalyst Grant in Deb Bailey's Honor**

A tribute to Deb Bailey's life and legacy

Grand Rapids, Michigan – April 29, 2020 – Sometimes you meet someone who instantly makes you feel better, more empowered, more relevant, and more connected to the world. Deb Bailey was one of those people. She embodied empathy and activism,



connecting the people and causes all around her. She led with love. Everyone who met Deb had the honor of becoming a bit star-struck, awed by the way she carried herself as a true force for good and change. We are heartbroken to learn that she passed away this week from complications due to multiple bouts with cancer over the past decades.

Deb's lengthy roster of achievements marks her passion for lifting the underdog. She served on countless boards, including the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation, Hospice of Michigan, Saint Mary's Foundation, Junior Achievement, Heart of West Michigan United Way, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, and the YWCA-West Central Michigan, among others. She was a strong supporter of the Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County.

Deb as the 2016 Junior League of Grand Rapids Gala Honoree

Deb also believed in the power of education. She served on the board of Aquinas College and as Vice Chairperson of the Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) Board of Trustees, where she attended as a student. After attending GRCC, she received her bachelor's degree, and then a master's degree in counseling, from Western Michigan University, followed by another master's degree in management from Aquinas College. It is not surprising that Deb was drawn to both counseling and

management in her professional life – two skills she combined so expertly in her life as a nonprofit activist.

Deb also set an example as a professional woman in corporate America, retiring from Steelcase in June 2018 as Director of Corporate Global Relations. Previously, her work included positions at Custer Office Environments, Herman Miller, Haworth, Aquinas College, and the Women's Resource Center.

Deb got her start in community activism and leadership with the Junior League of Grand Rapids, where she was a member for almost 40 years. Deb served as President of the Junior League while raising her baby girl, Alix, as a single mother. During her Junior League tenure – and just two-and-a-half years after adopting Alix – Deb was diagnosed with cancer. Undeterred, Deb co-founded Gilda's Club of Grand Rapids with other Junior League members to support families and loved ones experiencing grief or cancer. (Here is a beautiful TEDxGR 2012 video of Deb telling the story of co-founding Gilda's Club: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzyygXLZyf4>.) Throughout her life, Deb remained a fierce public advocate for cancer research and for the care of cancer patients and their loved ones.



Junior League of Grand Rapids Receiving a Service Award from Gilda's Club – 2017

As a Junior League member, Deb used her characteristic grit and drive to raise funds and volunteer for community projects in support of women and children throughout Grand Rapids. Deb remained actively involved as a Junior League Sustaining Member and was recognized for her lifetime of community work as the 2016 Junior League of Grand Rapids Gala Honoree. She described the training she received through the Junior League as the best leadership training of her life, surpassing other professional training on an international scale. She continued inspiring and mentoring new generations of Junior League leaders throughout her life.



Deb as 2016 Junior League of Grand Rapids Gala Honoree

Deb was a champion for equity. Her passion propelled the Junior League of Grand Rapids to focus on diversity and inclusion 35 years ago – a legacy that continues today with ever-increasing momentum and focus. In the late '80s and early '90s, she successfully shifted the League's activities to accommodate a more diverse group of women, including moving meeting times from during school hours to after work and promoting a highly proactive culture of inclusivity. Her goal was to make the Junior League a place where women of every race and background felt immediately accepted, appreciated, and personally friended.

Deb's community awards paint a picture of her broad impact. In addition to the 2016 Junior League Gala award, the list includes the YWCA Tribute Award for Community Service, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce Athena Award, Herman Miller's Outstanding Employee Award, and the Aquinas College Outstanding Alumni Award. She was also named one of the Grand Rapids Business Journal's 25 Most Influential Women in West Michigan and, most recently, received West Michigan Woman's Valiant Victor Award.

Deb was as tireless and well-rounded in her personal interests as she was in her corporate and nonprofit work. Long-time friend and fellow Junior League member Susan K. Jones remembers that before Deb became a mom, she used to make many of her own clothes, including business suits, that "looked like they came off a high-end rack." Deb also busied herself with home improvement projects late into the night and opened her home to gatherings of all sorts. "Deb was interested in everything and everyone. She was one of those people who made you feel as if you were the only person in the world when you had her attention," says Ms. Jones. "Deb wanted to know what people thought about issues, and asked sincere and deep questions."

Susan J. Smith also became friends with Deb through the Junior League of Grand Rapids. "It was through our work as founders of Gilda's Club that I really got to know her and appreciate her many admirable personal qualities and substantial skill set," she

reflects. "Deb was a great leader, always able to communicate with people with insight and wisdom while being a lot of fun. We worked hard and laughed a lot. I truly enjoyed the work we did together and appreciate her contribution to making Gilda's Club such a special place. She leaves a memorable legacy."

Deb was apparently carefully curating a large group of friends to remain in Grand Rapids in retirement. In true Deb fashion, she refused to sit idly by as friends emigrated south for retirement and instead rallied and organized them into a unified midwestern front.



Past Junior League of Grand Rapids Presidents' Event - 2017

Deb Bailey Community Catalyst Grant Announced:

In recognition of her life and accomplishments, the Junior League of Grand Rapids Board of Directors will rename its annual community grant the Deb Bailey Community Catalyst Grant. The competitive grant is awarded annually to a community organization that aligns with the Junior League's mission of improving children's physical health. In 2019, the Junior League awarded the \$10,000 grant to the YWCA-West Central Michigan to provide food for families escaping domestic violence. In 2020, the Boys and Girls Club of Grand Rapids Youth Commonwealth received the \$10,000 grant to provide nearly 10,000 snacks and meals for children attending the club's after school programs. The grant is awarded annually in an amount to be determined by the Board. The award will remind the Junior League and the community every year of Deb's incredible passion and ability to collaborate for exponential impact. The grant is funded by the Junior League's fundraising efforts and endowment.

Deb's legacy is one of fearless and empathetic leadership. We are so lucky to have known Deb during her amazing lifetime.



Deb with the Past Three JLGR Presidents – October 2019