

'She really is a drum major for justice'

Chapel Hill-Carrboro
NAACP honors Delores
Bailey with award

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Delores Bailey, an executive director for EmPOWERment Inc., is the 2021 Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award recipient.

Bailey works with a diverse group of people in the Chapel-Hill Carrboro area, mostly women of color, to empower individuals by creating work opportunities, finding affordable housing and stimulating personal economic growth.

Bailey said she appreciates the award but couldn't have done it without the work of other women and community leaders in Chapel Hill.

"When I won this award, I thought about them," she said. "It was just, I was there at the right time, right place."

Every year, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP honors an individual in the community who demonstrates dedication to raising awareness and remedying social justice issues.

Dawna Jones, president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP, said when she thinks of the award, Bailey is the first person who comes to mind.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF DELORES BAILEY

Delores Bailey is the 2021 Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award recipient.

justice," Jones said.

However, fighting for social justice and racial equality was not what Bailey initially planned for her life. Bailey studied at UNC from 1987-90 to become a mechanical engineer, but after losing her job in 2001, she found EmPOWERment, Inc.

"It's almost like I was assigned to do this, honestly," Bailey said. "They keep telling me at different points at different stations of my life, you can't save everybody, but I don't believe that."

In 2002, EmPOWERment hired Bailey as community organizer to work in the Northside community, a traditionally African American

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Delores Bailey

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neighborhood suffering from a loss of home ownership due to increased demand for student rentals.

Bailey said the organization rents out spaces to growing small businesses, two-man shops and entrepreneurs — targeting women and minority business owners because they know the barriers they face when trying to rent in downtown Chapel Hill.

Now, having worked at EmPOWERment for 19 years, Bailey has expanded the organization to own 58 rental units all over Orange County in order to support local business owners. Bailey said EmPOWERment looks forward to constructing an apartment building to provide affordable housing for individuals in Chapel Hill.

"We don't have a large budget," Bailey said. "Nobody else is building rentals for the people that we are helping. We are helping the lowest of low income — these apartments will be for those people who go out every day and work and cannot afford to live in Chapel Hill."

Trinnette Cooper, a coordinator

for the diversity program at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, is one of the people who nominated Bailey because of her personality and ability to get work done.

"I think that probably has been a big part of what has afforded her to have all these connections in so many different areas," she said. "To really do the most for the most (people) and leverage resources in a way that makes her worthy of receiving this honor."

At the end of the day, Bailey said her energy comes from seeing people stable in their homes, or working in a job to provide for their families.

"I'm going to share with you this scripture in the Bible — it says if you give a brother your shirt off your back, I know another will come for me from somewhere else," Bailey said. "I believe that if you've got that kind of heart, that kind of attitude, you can continue to give, your strength and your finances will come from somewhere, it will work."

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