

## 2021 Dorothy Dellinger “Dot” Marlow Philanthropic Catalyst Award

# Kathleen Lees

To say Kathleen Lees has lived a life of service to others would barely scratch the surface of the impact she’s had on the world. Studying bacteriology at Brown University, courageously working in aeronautical engineering with Pratt-Whitney during wartime, and selflessly volunteering at an infant and disabled children’s hospital while living in Brazil, she has an incredible life story. Yet, even in retirement, Kathleen’s passion to give continued as she committed to being a Guardian ad Litem for nearly two decades. Her servant’s heart and desire to help improve life for all has never waned.

Kathleen’s earliest memories of volunteering are some of her fondest. She and her husband Lew lived in Brazil during his tenure with Caterpillar, Inc. While there, Kathleen cared for hospitalized infants and young children in need. “That was a good frontier experience,” she shared. “I enjoyed my work there and learned a lot.”

When it was time to leave behind their vocations, the pair retired to Hendersonville in 1985. And, with her heart strings pulled by children, Kathleen signed up to serve as a Guardian ad Litem in Henderson County within her first year here. For the next 19 years, she helped countless children by advocating for their best interests in court, typically handling a case load of three to five children at a time. It was during those years that she learned the true importance of taking the time to understand people from all walks of life and to help children grow to be part of their communities. “It was the most important work of my life,” she stated.

When Winston Churchill said, “We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give”, his insight was meant to reflect the heart of individuals like Kathleen whose life of giving made great impact. Coinciding with her advocacy work as a Guardian ad Litem, Kathleen

became an involved member of St. James Episcopal Church, Housing Assistance Corporation, Interfaith Assistance Ministries, United Way of Henderson County, the Foster Care Committee, Planning Alliance for Community Empowerment, Parents Assistance League, Council on Women, League of Women Voters, Fetal-Infant Mortality Team, and the Child Protection Team. In addition to her incredible community service, she also made time to be a classroom volunteer at Bruce Drysdale Elementary.

Kathleen was furthermore instrumental in spearheading the first Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Breakfast more than 20 years ago as part of her decade-long service on the Human Relations Council of Henderson County. She served as the organization’s President and gained a sincere appreciation and understanding of others both inside her community and the world around her.

“When you work hands-on, you learn what an organization is in need of,” Kathleen said. “You realize what they don’t have and need, and then you become an advocate for them to reach others that can join you in your efforts to make positive outcomes.”

Kathleen Lees not only embodies the spirit of a servant and leader like Dot Marlow but also that of a person who inspires all. When asked about the type of legacy she wished to leave, Kathleen quickly and easily replied, “I hope it’s that I’ve helped improve people’s lives, and I’m an example for others to do the same. We should all work hard to understand people from all walks of life.”

**The Dorothy Dellinger “Dot” Marlow Philanthropic Catalyst Award honors a community member that exemplifies selfless volunteer leadership in philanthropic work for our community’s greater good. The award recognizes a person who continually advocates for others and works so that everyone can become their best self. Like Dot’s tireless enthusiasm to better the community, each recipient reflects her extraordinary spirit.**

