

Outstanding Emerging Philanthropist #1

* I have read the 2021 NPD nomination guidelines. Nominee Name * Lauren Harkey

Title/Business or Organization Name

Nominee Address *



Nominee Email *

Nominee Phone Number *

Name & Organization of Individual Submitting

Nomination *

Sarah Lanners Avinger, YWCA Central Carolinas



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Narrative *

YWCA Central Carolinas is thrilled to nominate Lauren Averill Harkey for National Philanthropy Day's 2021 Outstanding Emerging Philanthropist Award. At the young age of 34, Lauren has already made an indelible mark on the Charlotte community through her philanthropic support, leadership, and engagement. Lauren's philanthropy in Charlotte is defined by her personal experience as a Charlotte native, her unique expertise in both contemporary art and law, and her firm belief that you must put into your community what you hope to get out of it. She makes a point to pair her financial investments with additional engagement, taking on numerous volunteer leadership roles while making significant personal investments in organizations including YWCA Central Carolinas, the Mint Museum, and Charlotte Country Day School. Lauren is a no-nonsense advocate for Charlotte and all of its residents who serves as an example for millennials – and Charlotteans of all ages – on how to make a real difference in our community.

Lauren's civic involvement began as a child; she volunteered regularly at a nursing home while in middle school and a hospital in high school. Lauren was raised in a family with a multi-generational commitment to philanthropy and to the community. They recognized their own comfort and believed in giving back to create opportunities for others to thrive. Even with this family mindset to philanthropy, Lauren was encouraged to find her own individual and authentic path for community involvement.

On that journey, Lauren attended UNC Chapel Hill majoring in Art History and Psychology. She earned her Masters of Letters in Modern and Contemporary Art with distinction from the University of Glasgow. Lauren then graduated cum laude from the UNC School of Law and began practicing family law in Charlotte. It was only a matter of time until Lauren's path took a turn back to art. She was invited to become part-owner of Hodges Taylor Contemporary Gallery & Consulting Firm in 2016 and became full owner and director in 2019. While Lauren's path in law and art may seem incongruous, she emphasizes that both paths have allowed her to advocate for others – first for families and now for artists. "I'm an artist advocate now," she explains. "That's why people go into law, too – to let someone else's perspective be heard." This commitment to advocating for others and for her community extends far past her professional life and into her philanthropic commitments.

Lauren has served as a member of YWCA Central Carolinas' board of directors since 2019. She is active in YWCA's Planning & Evaluations Group (an executive committee of the board that is open to the full board but not required).

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Additionally, she co-led the facilities section of the organization's strategic planning process for 2021-2023, bringing her facilities expertise from running a gallery and renovating a gallery space. Through this process, Lauren and one other board member worked with the staff to set facility and campus-related goals. These goals take on a greater importance given the affordable housing to be built on YWCA's campus over the next several years. (YWCA and DreamKey Partners will be developing 104 units of affordable housing, with construction beginning in 2022.) Additionally, Lauren used her expertise to guide the placement of several pieces of fine art that were donated to YWCA in 2020, and she will also guide YWCA in future outdoor art installations that will be part of our affordable housing community. Finally, Lauren has been a faithful donor to YWCA since 2017.

Lauren came by her involvement in YWCA honestly; YWCA was a household subject all of her life. Her grandmother, Lib Harkey, spent years actively involved with YWCA, including serving as board president in the 1970s. Getting involved with YWCA was a way for Lauren to honor her grandmother's commitment to social justice while combining her own passions. Kirsten Sikkelee, CEO of YWCA Central Carolinas, explains, "As a younger woman growing up in the YWCA movement, I had the great fortune to have the mentorship of women who led the YWCA many decades ago. One of those women, Lib Harkey, had an amazing granddaughter who fully absorbed her commitment to racial equity and women's empowerment. That granddaughter, Lauren Harkey, is inspiring new generations with her volunteer leadership and philanthropic spirit. Despite being one of our youngest board members, she is an active and committed member. It is an honor to work alongside her as we continually renew YWCA's commitment to our community."

In addition to her involvement with YWCA, Lauren is also a committed supporter of the Mint Museum and is a past president of the Young Affiliates of the Mint (YAM). Lauren first became involved with YAM when she returned to Charlotte after grad school. YAM's fundraising efforts support free school tours of the Mint Museum for Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools students. As a graduate of Charlotte Country Day, Lauren had access to experiences like touring the Mint Museum as a child. She recognized this as a privilege and knew it was not afforded to all, which served as a motivator for her involvement with YAM. In addition to the Young Affiliates of the Mint, Lauren also served on the Mint's Craft, Design & Fashions Collections board and the Advancement Committee. Her work with the Mint Museum is ongoing.

Lauren's involvement with the Mint Museum and YWCA as well as her busy career running Charlotte's longest running art gallery and consultancy are enough to fill an incredibly busy schedule, but Lauren's civic involvement continues! She serves on the board of Goodyear Arts as well as South End Board, an arm of the Center City partners. She is Alumni Council Member at Charlotte Country Day, previously serving as Alumni Council President. And she was appointed by the mayor to serve on the City of Charlotte's Public Art Commission. Through each of these activities and leadership roles as well as those previously described, Lauren leads by example.

In addition to the volunteer leadership described above, Lauren provides ongoing financial support to these organizations and others that align with her values. Lauren is very intentional about the organizations she supports on an annual basis, only choosing to give to those organizations that she volunteers with or has a deep involvement. Those include: Mint Museum, Charlotte Country Day, YWCA Central Carolinas, Goodyear Arts, McColl Center, and Council for Children's Rights.

Lauren approaches her giving and involvement with an authenticity that is unique. She believes that philanthropy is about finding your own path and encourages others to do the same. She views her philanthropy as personal and separate from her business; she never wants to approach philanthropy with an ulterior motivation like company visibility. She finds herself at a time in her life when she is able to devote time, energy, and resources to her community, so she sees her philanthropic support and involvement as "a given." In Lauren's words, "You have to put energy into what you want to see in your community...Exposure doesn't happen if you don't pierce your own bubble. It's perspective-generating. That's how the moral sundial tilts."

As her story of philanthropy demonstrates, Lauren Harkey is the quintessential "Outstanding Emerging Philanthropist."

She strategically gives her time, energy, expertise, and treasure to organizations that she is passionate about and that are making true differences in our community. At a remarkably young age, she makes significant investments with a no nonsense approach. She is matter-of-fact in her philanthropy, seeing her philanthropic support as both natural and necessary while shying away from any attention she might receive from it. YWCA is proud to have Lauren Harkey as a committed, engaged board member and donor and honored to nominate her for the National Philanthropy Day Outstanding Emerging Philanthropist Award.

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Include a summary statement (150 words or less) that best describes your nominee and their philanthropy. If your nominee is selected, your quote will be used in social media, the event program, and other community outreach efforts.

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Lauren Harkey is the quintessential “Outstanding Emerging Philanthropist.” At only 34, she has already made an indelible mark on Charlotte, serving currently on the board of YWCA Central Carolinas and previously holding the roles of president of the Mint Museum’s Young Affiliates of the Mint and Alumni Council President at Charlotte Country Day. She strategically gives her time, energy, expertise, and treasure. Lauren’s philanthropy in Charlotte is defined by her personal experience as a Charlotte native, her unique expertise in both contemporary art and law, and her firm belief that you must put into your community what you hope to get out of it. She believes that philanthropy is about finding your own path and encourages others to do the same. Lauren is an advocate for Charlotte and its residents who serves as an example for Charlotteans of all ages on how to make a real difference in our community.

* I certify that the nominee will be able to attend the award luncheon on November 18th.

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