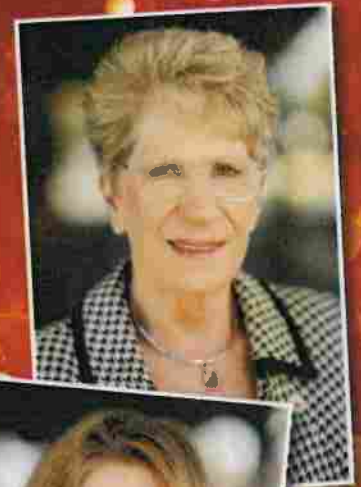


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The premier lifestyle magazine of Prince William and Greater Manassas



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2023 Influential Women Awards

Making a Difference. — Improving Prince William

... 2023 ...

influential **women**
award

by **prince william**
living

By Dawn Klavon | Photography by Rob Jinks

Each of the women honored for this year's Influential Women Awards has had her fair share of hot water in her career and her lifetime. But as Mrs. Roosevelt so aptly said it, hot water can bring out the strength she never knew she had — strength to distribute food to hungry children, foster equity and inclusion, assist the immigrant community, mentor marginalized women in the workplace, and support local nonprofits, businesses, and residents.

Each of the following women leads courageously and selflessly by serving others, which, as it turns out, is the true test of greatness.

Prince William Living Magazine is proud to announce the winners of the 2023 Influential Women Awards.

Congratulations to these Influential Women!

Kristina Keech Spitler

Vanderpool, Frostick & Nishanian attorney Kristina Keech Spitler is a visionary leader with a passion to see her community thrive.



After years of investigating various leadership programs and considering different models best for Prince William, Spitler helped create Leadership Prince William, Inc. Originating from a joint task force of the Prince William County-Greater Manassas Chamber of Commerce and the Prince William Regional Chamber of Commerce, Spitler pulled the right people together to ensure the program's success. She left no stone unturned, drafting articles and bylaws that brought two competing chambers together, recruiting board members and the executive director, and developing the organizations' vision, mission, and operational plans.

"Leadership Prince William unites a dedicated and diverse group of leaders committed to growing and strengthening our community," said Yolanda Burnett, Spitler's nominator. "For the first time in our area, it brings together business, government, and nonprofit/civic organizations to focus on our community."

As Leadership Prince William graduates, leaders are more knowledgeable about the area and committed to bringing diverse skills, talents, and leadership to the community. A member of the first class, Spitler continues to serve on the Board of Regents.

On top of that, Spitler formed the local Prince William chapter for the Society for Human Resource Management. The PWSHRM recently completed the 11th Annual Employment Law Summit, where Spitler updated local business owners and human resource individuals on new government and local law updates.

Amazingly, Spitler devotes substantial time and energy mentoring not just the young associates in her office but other young women in the community. She intentionally highlights accomplishments of young women who work with and for her,

while encouraging them to be better leaders. Spitler created the founding chapter of the Prince William Virginia Women's Attorney Association and works with organizations such as Justice Like Me to ensure her efforts extend to young women of marginalized backgrounds.

"She is devoted to improving her profession and the young women within it," Burnett said.

Evelyn BruMar

Evelyn BruMar wants to make a true difference in the world. To that end, she founded and serves as Executive Director for the Casa BruMar Foundation, a non-profit group bridging the gap for the LGBTQ+ community when it comes to equality in education, social services, and human dignity in the Commonwealth of Virginia and in Prince William.



Her aim is acceptance, assistance, and advocacy. In 2022, the Gainesville resident provided LGBTQIA+ competency and inclusivity training for three local law enforcement agencies as a part of their Crisis Intervention Training. In addition, BruMar provided the same robust training to Prince William County Public Libraries staff.

"Over the past year, Evelyn has directly helped two clients within the Greater Prince William area in need of housing as they escaped from homes where they are no longer welcome, due to just being who they are," said wife Heidi BruMar, nominator, and secretary/board member for Casa BruMar Foundation. "The clients receive short-term financial assistance, help connecting with resources, and personal support."

Working completely pro bono, BruMar is passionate about the Casa BruMar Foundation mission to support the LGBTQIA+ community across the Commonwealth. She works diligently to

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connect clients to resources and support organizations, and to help them when they run into obstacles.

Her influence is evident by the advisory boards on which she proudly serves. BruMar is the Vice Chair of the Prince William Human Rights Commission, hearing cases about possible discrimination within Prince William. She is also a member of the LGBTQ Advisory Board to the Governor of Virginia, and as such has been networking with other advisors across the Commonwealth. As if that were not enough, BruMar chairs the Health Committee on the board and provides input to the Governor on a number of issues affecting the Virginia LGBTQIA+ community. She has been tirelessly devoted to her cause, colleagues say.

"Evelyn's passion and caring nature has led her to form a foundation that can help our community," Heidi said.

Vanessa Gattis

Dr. Vanessa Gattis has spent a lifetime leading. Now a retired colonel, the Woodbridge resident served in the U.S. Army for more than 30 years before moving to the private sector. In 2018, Gattis endeavored to combat food insecurity by establishing a nonprofit organization called Prince William County Community Foundation.



"She learned that over 14,000 students are left hungry over the summer months when school is not in session," said Monae Nickerson, her nominator. "She instituted a program called the Combating Hunger on Wheels, or C.H.O.W., Wagon Initiative to distribute food to children and residents across PWC."

Since 2019, Gattis' organization has distributed almost 650,000 meals for food insecure children and residents in the county.

But Gattis expanded the foundation to do even more. Through her efforts, in 2022, six high school seniors were awarded \$16,000 in scholarships, and she helped 14 non-profits raise over \$90,000 to continue to operate and fulfill their mission. Her leadership skills were front and center during the summer of

2022, when she led the PWCCF's successful community Back-to-School event, drawing more than 2,500 community residents and 40 sponsors.

"During the event, over 1,000 backpacks were distributed so that the students in Prince William County would return to school fully equipped with school supplies to have a successful start of the year," Nickerson said. "She believes together, WE can make a difference!"

Known throughout our community for her exemplary work ethic, integrity, and fortitude, Gattis' goal is to see Prince William thrive, offering community members a better quality of life.

"She not only talks the talk, but she walks the walk," Nickerson said. "She is a very humble leader who wants to bring out the best in others — I am honored to call her a friend and sister."

Donna Flory

Donna Flory always goes the extra mile. Though she has served as the Community Service Chair of the local Rotary and class speaker for the Leadership Prince William Class of 2022, she continues to look for more opportunities to positively impact lives in her community.



"Mrs. Donna has a heart of gold and is always seeking ways to help others," said Dr. Sabrina Ricks, her nominator. "She dresses us for every holiday and goes out to mingle with the kids and the elderly... over the Christmas holiday she went out into the community dressed as an elf singing Christmas carols."

It turns out Flory is quite a talented musician, excelling at playing the trumpet and performing for well-attended community events including the "Hanging of the Wreaths" ceremony at the Arlington Cemetery. She sets an example of love, hard work, and helping others, all while having fun.

"Mrs. Donna is fun, upbeat, and always smiling," Ricks said.

“She is the life of the party — what an inspiration and example for women all around!”

Flory’s zealous commitment to the community knows no boundaries. She serves as a Community Volunteer Leader and Leadership Council member of the American Red Cross in Prince William, member of the Fauquier Bank Board of Directors, and is now enrolled in Leadership Prince William’s 2023 Signature Program.

“Honestly, it’s hard to think of organizations that Donna isn’t involved in,” said Patrick King, who nominated Flory. “I really can’t say enough about Donna and her impact.”

Flory has made substantial contributions to Prince William’s business community for many years, consistently supporting local nonprofits, businesses, and residents. Nominators emphasize that she’s been an inspiration for so many in the area, whether their focus is business, volunteerism, or sponsoring local causes.

“She’s one of those members of the region that you can always count on to lead the charge for making Prince William County a better place,” King said.

Lisa Shea

Lisa Shea is a nationally recognized immigration lawyer, working tirelessly to support immigration and human rights. Shea founded Immigrants First, PLLC in 2007, an immigration and human rights law firm, employing 10 women. More than a year ago, she merged with Vanderpool, Frostick & Nishanian, P.C. to head up the firm’s immigration law practice.



Her valuable contributions are getting noticed. Shea was awarded the 2021 Prince William County Universal Human Rights Award for her outstanding work assisting the immigrant community in the county and for her relentless efforts pursuing justice and due process.


“Ms. Shea routinely offers pro bono assistance to community leaders, judges, lawyers, pastors, and teachers on immigration

issues through consultations and presentations,” said Catherine von Zakrzewski, Shea’s nominator.

Due to her unique and advanced skill set, she is a primary educator on immigration consequences of crimes and helps ensure criminal lawyers and judges are apprised of the law on these issues.

Women’s human rights is yet another specialty for Shea. She’s won many cases involving severe gender-based persecution and torture of women, served on the board of ACTS/Turning Points, and skillfully trained their staff on women’s human rights and immigration issues.

As president of the Prince William Virginia Women Attorneys Association Chapter, Shea created unique and robust networking opportunities for women. Her incredible work has been recognized, as she won the Justitia Award in service of the advancement of women in Prince William County in 2015. She worked as an adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center on women’s human rights issues for five years and twice volunteered at the border to help women and children who were fleeing gang violence and human trafficking.

“She is an amazing lawyer and human being — she helps clients heal their traumas,” said von Zakrzewski. “Her first question as a lawyer and community service provider is always ‘How can I help?’” 

Dawn Klavon is a contributing writer for Prince William Living. Reach her at dklavon@princewilliamliving.com.

Congratulations to all our 2023 Influential Women Nominees!:

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|------------------|-------------------------|
| Traci Ali | Sultana Karim |
| Evelyn BruMar | Tara Melvin |
| Januari Coates | Guinevere (Gwen) Rowell |
| Madlin Edmonds | Olivia Savage |
| Donna Flory | Lisa Shea |
| Maritza Gabriel | Nijama Smalls |
| Vanessa Gattis | Nydia Soto |
| Cristina Gilliam | Kris Spittler |
| Amy Poole | Joy Teller |
| Tiffany Izenour | Michelle Viggiano |
| Jessica Jemmott | Wendy Weldon |