

Remembering Steven A. Minter
Eulogy Delivered by Ronn Richard
November 2, 2019

- Good morning, dear Minter family members and friends.
- It is indeed a great honor to have been invited to say a few words today in celebration of the life of Steven A. Minter—my predecessor, dear and true friend, confidant, mentor, and role model. But, my remarks today are truly on behalf of the entire Cleveland Foundation family, including our current and former staff and board members – especially those who had the privilege of working with Steve – our generous donors, and our wonderful nonprofit partners. We are all feeling deep sorrow today mixed with the joy that comes from remembering the light that emanated from, and continues to emanate from, this most inspiring and remarkable human being.
- To celebrate Steve’s life, I’d like to reflect back on his accomplishments. It is difficult, actually impossible, to capture the breadth and depth of Steve’s transformative contributions to our Northeast Ohio community – first during his 15-year career at the Cuyahoga County Welfare Department, where he rose to be Director, and then during his nearly three-decade long tenure at the Cleveland Foundation, where he served starting in 1974 as the program officer for social services and later, from 1984 until 2003, as Executive Director and President. So, I won’t even attempt to capture his accomplishments in any comprehensive way. But when I think about Steve’s legacy, some common themes emerge.
- Genuine, meaningful relationships were at the heart of Steve’s leadership. He had a gift for seeing, and believing in, the great

potential of all people. He was a masterful bridge builder – forging powerful connections with individuals and organizations alike. His passion motivated legions of admirers to join his coalition of changemakers. And like any great team player, he didn't seek credit. Steve knew there was strength in community – that our sum was greater than our parts.

- But I think all of us in this room know that Steve was, more often than not, the Most Valuable Player on any team he joined. He led the way and provided the intellectual and political firepower to shape and execute these projects, and he often used his corporate and national foundation contacts and his powers of persuasion to fundraise for them.
- Steve was incredibly strategic and pragmatic in his approach to solving the big problems. He knew our community's resources were best used to address the root causes of an issue, rather than to treat the symptoms. This not only demonstrates Steve's commitment to good stewardship, but also his desire to affect real, systemic change.
- **Steve inspired our community to care for the health of our most vulnerable populations.** He led the launch of the Cuyahoga County Early Childhood Initiative, which ensured that every newborn baby in the county received a visit from a qualified nurse to provide the parents with important health-related information and direction to other services. One-third of these visits led to an important referral, making it a very successful initiative.
- And he boldly fought one of the most challenging health crises of our time, demonstrating great courage to address the AIDS epidemic before any other non-coastal grantmaker. Undeterred by ill-informed stigmas surrounding this devastating epidemic and warnings that helping to fight AIDS might negatively impact the foundation's

reputation, Steve launched a public awareness campaign and partnered with the Ford and George Gund Foundations to equip community healthcare providers with the resources they needed to fight the spread of this disease. As always, he let his conscience be his guide.

- **Steve inspired our community to protect and nurture our treasured arts and cultural assets.** His leadership at the Cleveland Foundation was instrumental in saving the historic Allen Theater and creating the Playhouse Square district as we know it today. Recognizing existential threats to funding for local arts and cultural organizations, Steve led the effort to establish the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture as well as the Cleveland Foundation's Building the Arts' Strength in Cleveland initiative, aimed at bolstering mid-sized arts institutions.
- And Steve was instrumental in transforming the profile and influence of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards, recruiting Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. to chair the Anisfield-Wolf jury and elevating the prize to the national prominence it deserves.
- **Steve inspired our community to revitalize Cleveland's physical landscape, investing in the vibrancy of our built environment.** He paved the way for the development of the city's lakefront at North Coast Harbor, which is today a favorite destination for residents and visitors alike, home to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Great Lakes Science Center.
- But Steve's true passion lay in Cleveland's neighborhoods – particularly the historically disinvested neighborhoods he had served during his time at the Cuyahoga County Welfare Department. It was Steve's leadership that brought together public and private partners

to develop Lexington Village, the first market-rate rental property to be built in Hough in 50 years.

- And it was Steve who brought together a coalition of partners that launched what we know today as Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, a groundbreaking intermediary for the city's community development organizations. All of this put into motion a momentum that realized key development projects across Cleveland's neighborhoods: Church Square at Euclid Avenue and East 79th Street, as well as Beacon Place and the Villas of Woodhaven next door to the Cleveland Clinic.
- It is impossible to travel across this city and not pass by a project, building or organization that Steve somehow helped. It is this blueprint for inclusive neighborhood growth that has inspired the foundation's next chapter – the creation of our permanent headquarters in MidTown, a vision that absolutely thrilled Steve, especially because the first floor of our headquarters building will be completely dedicated to community use. He had eagerly anticipated standing alongside us to cut the ribbon on the new building, and I had eagerly anticipated helping Steve to move his portrait from our current Minter Conference Center to its new home in our MidTown headquarters. So, Michele, Caroline and Robyn, I hope you will stand in for your father on that joyous occasion.
- As part of his larger vision to address the enduring inequities that plagued Greater Cleveland, **Steve inspired our community to make serious investments in public education.** Steve's national reputation as a frame-breaker in public education had been established early in his tenure at the Cleveland Foundation, when he went on sabbatical from the foundation to serve President Carter, who had appointed him the founding Undersecretary of Education – the number two slot in the newly established U.S. Department of Education.

- Later, Steve was instrumental in achieving Mayoral control over the Cleveland public school system, which was, and continues to be, vitally important in the effort to improve Cleveland’s schools. And you could say that he provided the inspiration for Say Yes to Education with the Cleveland Institute for Education—a philanthropic-corporate partnership to establish post-secondary scholarship and employment programs and serve as a think tank for public school reform.
- **Steve similarly inspired our community to support the industries and companies that could create jobs for residents and fuel our regional economy.** He supported our anchor institution hospitals, among our largest employers, in a wide variety of ways – most notably bringing the systems together to collaborate on medical research. He supported efforts to attract new biotech firms to Cleveland through the creation of BioEnterprise, and he worked to keep manufacturing jobs in Cleveland by helping to establish the Cleveland Advanced Manufacturing Program.
- Underpinning all of these accomplishments was Steve’s unparalleled philanthropic stewardship of the community’s endowment. Under his leadership, the Cleveland Foundation’s assets grew by nearly \$1 billion, and – perhaps more importantly to Steve – this allowed the foundation to greatly expand its impact, growing grants by 450%. Steve accomplished this, in part, the same way he accomplished many things: by welcoming more people to the table, inspiring others to join the vision and maintaining the focus on the long-term goal.
- During Steve’s tenure, the foundation welcomed a new generation of philanthropists, creating more opportunities for donors who wished to play an active role in grantmaking, and lifting up the rich tradition of giving in the African-American community through the creation

of the African-American Philanthropy Committee at the Cleveland Foundation.

- Steve supported the field of philanthropy on a national and international level by helping to establish the Council on Foundations and several overseas community foundations. These efforts led to his receiving the Council on Foundation's Distinguished Grantmakers Award for Lifetime Achievement, considered to be the highest honor in our field.
- While I could go on listing even more accomplishments from Steve's history of transformative impact, I believe Steve's greatest legacy is evident here in this room today. It's the people he trained, mentored, transformed, and loved.
- It's the public servants, corporate executives and non-profit leaders who benefitted from his advice; foundation colleagues who were inspired by him and went on to do great things, both within our foundation and at many other foundations and nonprofits. His legacy is to be found in all the children who got a better education, better health care, better recreational opportunities, better access to the arts and an overall better quality of life because of him. However, his most enduring legacy is family – especially his daughters: Michele, Caroline and Robyn, and his grandchildren – all of whom he was so incredibly proud of. And I have never seen a love so strong as the bond between Steve and Dolly. Their beautiful partnership endures today through their family.
- I am so very grateful to Steve and Dolly for the love, kindness and support they have given to my wife Bess and me since the day we arrived in Cleveland. It is rare to have a predecessor make such a strong effort to ensure that his successor can thrive and succeed. Steve has always been there for me and we had many wonderful

times together. He helped me steer through difficult shoals in my professional and personal life, and I am forever grateful for his guidance and friendship.

- The qualities and principles we all admired in Steve feel increasingly rare in today's era of deep civil discord. He was honest, diplomatic and had great judgment. He was patient but had a sense of urgency for social justice. He was persistent and courageous; he had grit in a velvet package. He understood politics and could work within a political system without compromising his values. Steve was living proof that you could be very powerful and very kind at the same time – that you could be exceedingly influential without a hint of arrogance. Steve was the personification of integrity.
- Once again, on behalf of the entire Cleveland Foundation family, we express our most heartfelt and loving condolences to Michele, Caroline, Robyn and your families. We are honored to think of ourselves as part of the Minter family, and we hold you in the highest regard. You will always be part of the Cleveland Foundation family.
- Steve may be gone physically but his influence is not. He is part of the Cleveland Foundation's DNA, and he is part of Cleveland's DNA. His passion is part of us. His dedication is engrained in us. We will spend every day moving forward trying to emulate his wisdom and his courage.
- Steve Minter was a truly beloved figure in this city, and I can assure you that his light will be a beacon for goodness and progress for decades to come. Thank you.