

**LEADER WHO SERVES AWARD RECIPIENT**

**ANITA L. JOHNSON ('22)**

*Real Talk 4 Returning Citizens*

**In which locality do you reside?**

I reside in the Northside of Richmond city.

**What brought you here, and what has kept you here?**

I grew up in Fulton, located within the East End of Richmond. Due to increased violence and crime in the community, I relocated my family to Richmond's Northside in 2001. What has kept me here is the openness and connections I have made with my neighbors, schools, and businesses that, to me, define a community.

**What does it mean to you to be a leader who serves?**

It means that I am of service, assistance, and support to others first, which puts me in a leadership role due to the trust, empathy, compassion, and hope I have for others.

**Who has inspired you or helped you grow as a leader?**

My mother inspired me to become a leader due to her committed efforts in the home and the Fulton community during racial unrest. As an adult, local leaders helped me grow by demonstrating to me from a systemic perspective, how to be a genuine leader who serves.

**Tell us more about your community leadership journey.**

Looking back, the journey was not easy, even with my professional background in mental health and social work, and volunteer work as a "Community Connector." When my neighborhood experienced gentrification, many neighbors expressed apprehension, mistrust, and fear. To create opportunities for community connections, my neighbor Wendy and I started a block club called "The Griffytes." We held porch parties and holiday events and celebrated senior

**Leader who serves:** Honors a member of the previous year's Leadership Quest class for creating an impact in their community and has exhibited attributes of a leader who serves first. Nominated and selected by fellow class members.

residents on the block. I now work with my civic association to expand this work to other blocks and neighborhoods across the city.

**Why did you participate in Leadership Quest? What were your biggest takeaways?**

After learning about LMR, I decided to participate in Leadership Quest. I saw the program as an opportunity to strengthen my position as a "Community Connector." My biggest takeaways were the opportunities to have real conversations and make connections with diverse leaders from the region. "We are ALL more alike than we are different." LMR demonstrated how to expand my thinking and how I respond to community needs.

**What is your vision for the future of the Richmond region?**

My vision is that Richmond becomes a template for community members to get to know their neighbors through small acts of kindness. That we participate in and are aware of social and civic engagement opportunities and acknowledge our country's challenges.

**What is the best advice you have ever received, and from whom?**

"Be kind to others that may be down and out." My mother gave me this advice. You can give people hope if you can't do anything else.

**What advice do you wish to share with regional leaders?**

Despite whatever power or position we may have or desire to hold, systems are connected to systems, and people are connected to people. If we can come together, we could be and do better.

