

Contact: Sue Brooks
Communications Manager

Michael Och House, A Center for Aging at JESPY, wins NJAAW's 2021 Carl F. West Award

SOUTH ORANGE, NJ – JESPY House and its Michael Och House, A Center for Aging at JESPY, received the 2021 Carl F. West Award from NJ Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW, formerly NJ Foundation for Aging, founded in 1998). JESPY House provides services to adults, age 18-73, with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Charisse Smith, West's niece and an NJAAW Board member, made the announcement at the nonprofit's 23rd annual (and 2nd virtual) conference, "Rebounding and Rebuilding." NJAAW's new Executive Director, Cathy Rowe, DrPH, later presented the crystal award at The Michael Och House to JESPY Shared Housing Supervisor Michelle Rampersant-Faulk, JESPY support staff and several Och House clients.

A dedicated advocate for older adults, Carl F. West (1939-2018) was the longest-serving Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Executive Director in the nation. He also held several leadership positions within the NJ Association of Area Agency on Aging (NJ4A). Nationally, he served as advocate on the Board of the National AAAA (N4A) as well as the National Caucus & Center on Black Aging (NCBA).

West sought to expand the local policy discussions beyond the key, but limited, national funding streams. As such, he joined three other AAA Executive Directors as co-founders of the NJ Foundation for Aging (NJFA) to focus on the basic needs of New Jersey's economically vulnerable older adults, their families and their caregivers. West served as first president of NJFA (now NJAAW).

To honor West, NJAAW sought nominations of individuals and organization that embody his drive and passion and have made a difference in the lives of older adults. A committee comprising West's colleagues and family members reviewed the nominations from around the state, and selected JESPY.

Located in South Orange, The Michael Och House, A Center for Aging at JESPY was nominated by Amy Engel, JESPY's Director of Development. JESPY House provides adults with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) with residential and programmatic services to help them lead lives of independence. In 2019, JESPY opened The Och House, a shared house where nine older clients now reside. Few NJ agencies are addressing the needs of older adults with I/DD, making JESPY unique. JESPY House serves 260 adults at every stage of life, providing them with a plethora of support and a wide range of vocational, recreational and residential options to encourage independence and choice.

"Unlike many other agencies, we offer a 'whole-life' program in the walkable town of South Orange. Our clients are truly a part of the community," says JESPY Executive Director Audrey Winkler. "They live and shop here, socialize and work here, and set down roots here. Many other agencies consider JESPY to be a model to emulate as we consistently seek to enhance our services for the clients we serve.

"In 2019, a major gift from the Och family allowed JESPY to establish The Michael Och House, a Center for Aging at JESPY so that older residential clients who needed more supports could remain part of JESPY and the South Orange community," Winkler says.

About NJAAW

NJ Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW, njaaw.org), formerly NJ Foundation for Aging, has been on the forefront of revolutionizing the aging experience since 1998. It is the only statewide nonprofit focused solely on providing leadership in public policy and education to enable older adults to live with independence and dignity in their communities. NJAAW's social action issues include senior housing and hunger, elder economic security, older workers and transportation. The award-winning Aging Insights, a monthly topical TV program produced by NJAAW, connects caregivers, aging adults and their families to community-based services and resources. The show is available on NJAAW's YouTube channel at youtube.com/c/njadvocatesforagingwell, at njaaw.org and more than 70 public-access stations across NJ (check local listings for channels and times). NJAAW also presents educational forums and an Annual Conference offering development opportunities and best practices for professionals entrusted with caring for older adults.