



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

Tom Kuczmarski, Town Hall Apartments and Ashton Applewhite Selected as The Village Chicago's 2021 Trailblazer Award Recipients

August 2, 2021—Chicago, IL—The Village Chicago is excited to announce the recipients of the 2021 Trailblazer Awards, which recognize outstanding achievement and extraordinary leadership in changing the narrative on aging. The awards will be presented September 21 at [our annual benefit: "It's the New Roaring '20s!"](#)

Trailblazers are individuals, organizations and authors who shatter stereotypes about aging and show that the decades of life after 50 are vital, engaging, productive and fulfilling.

Board President Karen Terry noted, "We are living in a time when working together toward common goals has taken on existential importance. What's at stake now is our city, our country, our planet. Through their work, these Trailblazers have demonstrated the immense benefits of a fully age-integrated, inclusive society where everyone's strengths are appreciated, respected, and utilized."

Tom Kuczmarski

By deed and example, Tom Kuczmarski has realized the promise of intergenerational collaboration and has built bridges across age, race and class. At age 50, while president of global consulting firm Kuczmarski Innovation, he co-founded Chicago Innovation, which has grown into a multifaceted innovation ecosystem focused on education, connection and celebration.

He serves on the board of RRF Foundation for Aging and has funded tech training and job search for older adults at Chicago Public Library branches. With The Village Chicago, he co-founded Ageless Innovators, Chicago's first cross-generational, co-mentoring program. For over 40 years, he has taught at Northwestern's Kellogg Graduate School of Management and is the author of eight books. Perhaps most importantly, he has shown that innovation and creativity are for everyone – from small non-profits, to start-ups, to global corporations.



What's at Stake: True Diversity Includes Age

Tom Kuczmarski says, "Innovation is for everyone, and we mean everyone. All ages, cultures, races, genders need to be at the table now." But, as Stanford's Ashley Martin points out, "...in the workplace, even fair-minded people seem to prioritize race and gender over age."

Despite this entrenched mindset, Tom Kuczmarski has surrounded himself with people of all ages and backgrounds -- intentionally including older adults in all that he does. He has created

a community of thousands who know how to collaborate across generations to unlock the value of innovation.

Town Hall Apartments

Town Hall Apartments is a life-changing, pioneering initiative – the first affordable LGBTQ-friendly senior housing in Chicago. Built in collaboration with Heartland Alliance and Center on Halsted, it directly addresses the housing discrimination and isolation issues that face Chicago’s more than 50,000 LGBTQ seniors. Heartland Alliance collaborated with local stakeholders to develop and manage this high-quality affordable housing.



The adjacent Center on Halsted is a comprehensive community center dedicated to the well-being of Chicago’s LGBTQ community and provides an array of programs and services to Town Hall residents and the community. Located in the heart of Chicago’s vibrant Lake View neighborhood, Town Hall Apartments is both a welcoming community, and a sustainable, innovative model of housing and inclusion.

What’s at Stake: Housing – A Growing Quality of Life Issue

The Milken Institute reports that low-income individuals and people living on a fixed income feel the effects of the nation’s affordable housing crisis acutely. Their study, “Age Forward Cities 2030” reports that design lags behind the need with only 3.5% of U.S. homes having the basic universal design elements older or disabled Americans need such as no-step entrances, single-floor living and extra-wide doors and hallways. And walkable, small- to mid-sized housing that’s affordable for middle income households can’t be found because it no longer exists.

Town Hall Apartments is an important example of how creative collaboration (with Heartland Alliance and Center on Halsted) can fill unmet needs – in this case by adaptive re-use of the historic decommissioned Town Hall police station along with new construction. This initiative demonstrates that it is possible to create homes and communities for people of all ages and life stages to live with dignity.

Ashton Applewhite

Ashton Applewhite's deeply researched and exuberant book, *This Chair Rocks – A Manifesto Against Ageism* is transformative. With wit, intelligence and moxie she has helped catalyze a global movement to recognize and eliminate age bias—starting between our ears. She wants us to recognize that it's not the passage of time that makes it hard to get older, it's ageism – a prejudice that pits us against our future selves, and each other.



Photo credit: Adrian Buckmaster

"Aging is not a problem to be fixed or a disease to be cured," she says. "It is a natural, powerful, lifelong process that unites us all." Applewhite has been recognized by the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, the *New Yorker*, and the American Society on Aging as an expert on ageism and speaks widely, at venues ranging from universities and community centers to the TED mainstage and the United Nations.

What's at Stake: "Ageism cuts both ways"

While older adults are most often the target for ageism, younger people also experience this prejudice. In a new Fast Company-Harris Poll, 36% of younger millennials and Gen Z say they've faced workplace ageism and nearly 40% of employed adults of all ages feel that people their age are viewed as out of touch at work.

As Applewhite make clear in her speaking and writing, it stems from baseless stereotypes up and down the age ladder. And, "like racism and sexism, ageism serves a social and economic purpose: to legitimize and sustain inequalities between groups." "Everyone is either old, or will be..." and Applewhite writes, "... unless we put an end to it, ageism will oppress us all."

"Age-friendly communities aren't just wheelchair- and walker-friendly, they're gurney- and skateboard- and stroller- and bus-passenger- and delivery-guy- and tired-person friendly. Let's call these programs what they are – all-age friendly. Let's acknowledge the need for helping hands, and reach for them gratefully and without shame."

Village CEO Darcy Evon remarked, "We are proud to be a part of the progress that these Trailblazers exemplify and their contributions to inclusion, age-integration, and the well-being of older adults. They inspire, inform and support everything the Village represents."

The Village Chicago is a social network of friendship, engagement and services for people over 50. We support all aspects of well-being and replace outdated assumptions about older adults with new and inclusive paradigms that drive innovation, collaboration, and an enriched quality of life for people of all ages. Visit us at www.thevillagechicago.org

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