

Price named Citizen of the Year

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HIGH POINT

Melody Burnett remembers assuring Leah Price four years ago that serving as vice chair for what was then the High Point Convention and Visitors Bureau would not be a burdensome or greatly time-consuming role.

The bureau, which has since been renamed Visit High Point, had a lot on its plate: It was early in the process of developing a 10-year strategic tourism plan centered on downtown redevelopment and was also planning to create a new nonprofit foundation.

Then the bureau's chairman, Patrick Harman, suddenly had to resign for personal reasons.

Burnett, president of Visit High Point, said no one would have blinked if Price, working as a bank market president while also serving on multiple boards throughout High Point, had made an excuse not to be elevated to chair and take on all the work ahead.

"She just stepped up," Burnett said. "She said, 'Well, I guess it's me.'"

In interviews with leaders among High Point's network of community nonprofits and other organizations, remarks about Price quietly accepting larger and more difficult volunteer responsibilities than she had expected came up several times. It is one of many qualities cited that they say qualify her as The High Point Enterprise Citizen of the Year for 2021.

"She will always kind of be tattooed in my brain as our chairman. She set the bar so high," Burnett said. "She really did get us through some tough times."

Price, the market president and president of commercial banking for Triad Business Bank, grew up partly in Thomasville and High Point, and since being named senior vice resident and High Point market executive for Premier Commercial Bank in early 2009, she has been deeply involved in the community. In an interview with the Enterprise in 2009, she said that since her days attending Appalachian State University she had been searching for a job she believed in that would allow her to make a difference in the community.

She serves as chair of the Foundation for Healthy High Point and has served

in leadership roles on the boards of numerous organizations, including the High Point Community Foundation, Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Way of Greater High Point, Forward High Point, Visit High Point, High Point Economic Development

Corp. and Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist High Point Medical Center. She has received numerous awards for that work over the years, including the High Point Chamber Volunteer of the Year, the N.C. Tennis Association Charity Event Award and being named

the N.C. Association for Fundraising Professionals' Philanthropy Award Volunteer Fundraiser.

One nomination letter said of Price, "She has been a banking advocate for so many companies in High

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Point, and (in) talking with her customers, they all love her as their advocate. But as a busy banker, she has always found time to volunteer in the community."

Wendy Rivers, president and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters, said, "She is always there when we need her. All we have to do is pick up the phone and call her."

Paul Lessard, president of the High Point Community Foundation, echoed that.

"She's one of the business people in this city that really understands that ... it's important to give back to the community you make your money in," he said.

Jane Liebscher, president of the United Way of Greater High Point, said she first saw Price's calm in the face of a storm during Price's time as the United Way's campaign chair in 2009, when the economy was still in a downward lurch from the Great Recession. The fundraising campaign didn't make its goal that year, and Liebscher said Price addressed it eloquently

in the board's annual meeting, where she quoted motivational speaker Vivian Greene.

"She said it's not about weathering the storm, it's about learning to dance in the rain," Liebscher said. "That's something she lives her life by."

Sometimes the storms that must be weathered involve handling various personalities who all have positive aims but may have different views on what should be done, Lessard said. Even in those complicated cases, Price is "always up, always positive" and solutions-oriented.

"I always felt comfortable going to her with complicated issues," he said. "She's a peacemaker, consensus-builder, and those are the kind of people who build your community."

One thing that may help Price keep her inner balance is her sense of humor, several of those interviewed said.

Liebscher said Price "never fails to bring a spark and a fun element" to what she's involved in, down to such small, whimsical touches as decorations on her fingernails, such as a snowman at Christmas or a ghost at Halloween.

"She loves to laugh at herself," Liebscher said.

"She's learned not to take herself too seriously."

Rachel Moss, the chief operating officer of the Business High Point Chamber of Commerce, recalls seeing Price walking past her office while pantomiming as though she were rowing a canoe down the hall.

Burnett said that Price will draw attention to her own accidentally comic mistakes, such as once when she realized that she was wearing mismatched shoes.

"It just makes her special and relatable," Burnett said.

Rivers said that Price had been such a large presence for Big Brothers Big Sisters that Rivers was happy one day to find a small way to honor that presence. Price, a painter, regularly donates some of her artwork to the organization's annual art auctions. One of those paintings, a work depicting several horses, struck Rivers, so without telling Price she just bought it herself. During the pandemic, anyone on a Zoom call with Rivers has seen it behind her.

"She was surprised when she saw it in my office," Rivers said. "I just thought it would be nice to have a little piece of her in my office."



LAURA GREENE | HPE

Leah Price, the market president and president of commercial banking for Triad Business Bank, is described by local philanthropy leaders as a meticulous and tireless worker for community causes.



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At a past United Way luncheon at the High Point Country Club, from left, Charles Cain and Megan Ward, each recipients of an award, stand with Leah Price, 2013-14 chairwoman for United Way of Greater High Point. Mary Bogest and Strib Boyton, center right, also received awards and are with Barbara Frye and Bobby Smith of United Way.