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HONORING A POWERHOUSE: SHEILA PENROSE CULTIVATES CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND GENEROSITY

Sheila Penrose (center) receives the 2025 Andrew J. McKenna Leadership Award, presented by John W. Madigan, Former Chairman & CEO, Tribune Company, and 2021 Andrew J. McKenna Leadership Award Honoree, (left) and Sean Garrett, President and CEO, United Way of Metro Chicago (middle).

Sheila Penrose at 10 years old and 20 years old (top and bottom)

Sheila Penrose is a powerhouse.

She's a shrewd economist by trade. A trusted advisor. Chairman. Philanthropist. Teacher. Volunteer. Mentor.

Sheila's resume is impressive—and her success is rooted in humility. Her upbringing was humble. She grew up in public housing in England, and her parents left school as teenagers. The one thing they wanted for Sheila and her brother was a great education, she said.

"I think for my parents an education meant that we would have opportunity. It meant that we would have curiosity and we'd be able to reach beyond our small little world," Sheila said. "My dad was the nurturer, and my mom was the driver. They set me on a route to independence and achievement. I knew I wanted to set a path for myself."

Sheila's path began with pursuing the education her parents so desired for her. She studied economics and education at the University of Birmingham in England, obtained a master's degree from the London School of Economics, and attended the Executive Program at Stanford Graduate School of Business. Sheila taught economics and political science and soon became an Economic Advisor at the British Treasury.

> "You have power. Use it constructively, use it for the benefit of others, use it generously. It's not about yourself. It's about what you can do with and for others because that comes back to you in spades.

After moving to Chicago and navigating a different culture, Sheila landed a role as an international economist at Northern Trust. "I had to learn how to network and negotiate and was fortunate to end up at Northern Trust," she said. "I'm an introvert by nature, so networking didn't come naturally to me. But I appreciated that relationships were very important, being a part of a team and going beyond yourself."

Sheila grew her network at Northern Trust—and had many mentors along the way—until eventually she served as President of Northern Trust's Global Corporate Bank. She was proud to be the first and only woman on the company's Management Committee at the time, she said. "I became a role model. You can't be what you can't see, and it's important for younger talented people coming up in an organization to be able to see what they can become."

Sheila also served as Chairman of JLL, a global real estate services company, for 15 years and went on to found Corporate Leadership Center with her business colleague, Cheryl Francis. Their goal was to help senior executives advance in their careers—and use business as a force for good, Sheila said.

"I've always believed that if you can help people become good business leaders, they're going to help create a good community. So many companies in Chicago

do that," Sheila said. "It's an honor to lay the path for others, and it's an expectation, especially in Chicago, that you pay it forward. Chicago is such a unique community in terms of the business world, the philanthropic world, and the civic world coming together to try to create a better environment, a better community, and a better set of opportunities."

United Way of Metro Chicago is one of those institutions working across sectors to build stronger communities, Sheila said. "United Way recognizes that those people who are underserved are deserving and they need our support. I love what United Way does to address that issue because it makes for a healthier community for all of us, a community that allows people to live up to their potential."

For decades, Sheila has helped people live up to their potential. In recognition of her commitment to cultivating generous civic leaders and philanthropists—and improving the quality of life of countless individuals and families across the Chicago region, Sheila Penrose received the 2025 Andrew J. McKenna Leadership Award at United Way of Metro Chicago's annual Stronger Neighborhoods Awards Luncheon on May 28, 2025.

"Andy McKenna was a huge role model for me. I held him in very high esteem," Sheila said. "It's a huge honor for me to have this award . . . It makes me emotional. It's an absolute privilege to be in the same ranks as people that I've admired so much."

The young girl in England who once sought a life of independence and achievement now serves as a trusted mentor to many. And encourages others to recognize and use their power for good.

"People don't often talk about power in association with women," Sheila said. "You have power. Use it constructively, use it for the benefit of others, use it generously. It's not about yourself. It's about what you can do with and for others because that comes back to you in spades."

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