

John and Ann Porter Commit to Supporting Etkin Scholars Program at ULI Charlotte

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JOHN PORTER, president of Charter Properties, and his wife, Ann, have committed to continue funding the Etkin Scholars Program in Charlotte, North Carolina, thus extending a national scholarship program that Bruce Etkin, former chairman of Etkin Johnson Real Estate Partners, established in 2021 with a \$1 million gift. The Porters' donation helps fulfil Etkin's vision that other ULI members would be inspired to continue and expand the program.

The program enables participating ULI District Councils to provide a cohort of graduate and undergraduate students with free ULI student membership, funding support, and access to programming, networking, and learning opportunities throughout the academic year. The program made its debut in fall 2021 at district councils in Atlanta, Baltimore, British Columbia, Charlotte, and Colorado and, since then, expanded to Boston, Philadelphia, Sacramento, and San Diego/Tijuana. In addition to covering costs to attend district council events, the program encourages councils to make events available virtually.

"We need to find members from each district council to sponsor it locally, perhaps for five or 10 years, or to provide an endowment," says Etkin, a ULI trustee and a member of the ULI Foundation board. "Whether they are studying architecture, engineering, business, real estate development, or a related field, this is the first opportunity for many of these college students to get involved in ULI and potentially become the future leaders of ULI."

Porter has long been involved with students in Charlotte as a teacher,

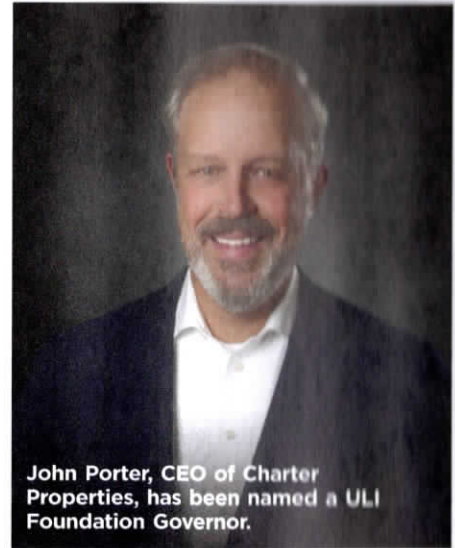
facilitator, and a judge for UrbanPlan. "When my wife, Ann, and I heard about what Bruce was doing, we loved the idea," Porter says. Theresa Burnett, executive director of ULI Charlotte, told Porter the Etkin Scholars Program would end with the 2023–2024 academic year unless someone stepped in, so he and his wife committed \$20,000 a year for three years to continue it.

"The program has been so successful in such a short period of time," Porter says. "As a family, we like to give to causes that help young people and promote diversity. My hope for this gift is that others would see what Bruce has done and follow suit."

ULI Charlotte was among the initial district councils to participate in the Etkin Scholars Program. "We were looking for a program that offered outreach to students as part of our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts," says Burnett, "and we thought that this would be a great way to engage leaders in our district council with students who could become future real estate professionals and leaders. John has been a great mentor for a lot of students, so it was a perfect fit."

In its first year, the Etkin Scholars Program enabled 10 students to participate through ULI Charlotte and expanded to more than a dozen students in each subsequent year. "Some have reapplied and been accepted as second-year scholars," Burnett says. "This is a good way to pave a path for them to go into the real estate industry."

Burnett notes that students have participated from a variety of academic institutions, including state universities, a community college,



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and a private historically black university. "The program allows us to create a network of students who might not otherwise interact with each other," she adds.

A key benefit of the Etkin Scholars Program is its flexibility, Burnett says: "We have also been able to fund additional opportunities, sending some students to Atlanta for an event on affordable housing and some to the ULI Carolinas Meeting." Scholars are also allowed to join ULI at the student member rate for one year after the program, even if they are no longer students.

To celebrate and recognize major gifts, naming opportunities for the scholarship program are available for both short-term and permanent endowment naming. In addition, by expanding on previous donations, Porter has been named a ULI Foundation Governor, joining a select group of members whose total giving amounts to \$100,000 or more. **UL**

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