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## **WestCOP Launches Bridge Builders to Foster Positive Dialogue Between Law Enforcement and Local Youth**

### ***Real Estate Developer Robert Martin Company Seeds New Racial and Social Justice Community Initiative with \$50,000 Grant***

ELMSFORD, NY (March 2021) – What started last fall with a series of informal discussions between executives from Westchester-based social services organization WestCOP and leading real estate developer Robert Martin Company senior executives about the firm’s desire to seed a new community initiative fostering constructive dialogue surrounding racial and social injustice issues led to the March 3<sup>rd</sup> launch of Bridge Builders, a public-private partnership focused on developing and operating three Police-Youth Advisory Councils (PYACs) in Greenburgh, Elmsford, and Tarrytown/Sleepy Hollow.

The Bridge Builders 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Summit will feature several notable speakers addressing an audience comprised of numerous law enforcement officials, school district leaders and counselors, area youth, community center and non-profit representatives, parents, municipal officials, and business leaders. Summit speakers include Westchester County District Attorney, the Honorable Miriam “Mimi” Rocah; Attorney at Law and Co-Chairman of the Westchester County Police Reform Taskforce, Mayo Bartlett, Esq.; Greenburgh Chief of Police, Christopher McNerney; Tarrytown Superintendent of Schools, Christopher Borsari; and several students from local school districts participating in the Bridge Builders program.

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Seeded with an initial \$50,000 grant from Robert Martin Company, a leading tristate real estate developer and management company, Bridge Builders utilizes models recommended by President Obama's *21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing Task Force* to help facilitate positive interactions and foster open communications between local police officers and youth with the goal of establishing long-term relationships to address racial and social injustice issues. PYACs provide non-confrontational educational and engagement opportunities to inspire participants to take constructive action in their respective neighborhoods.

“Robert Martin Company came to us with the concept for creating a series of local police-youth advisory councils, but their ideas and investment were matched with a genuine desire to have WestCOP shape Bridge Builders based on community feedback rather than dictating the program's final form,” noted WestCOP Executive Director, Donnovon Beckford. “Because of the company's willingness to listen more than lead, Bridge Builders launches today with buy-in from many more voices than any other program we have initiated in recent memory.”

“Even in the middle of tackling a pandemic, the national events of last summer resonated with us and demonstrated a real need for business leaders to engage in racial and social injustice issues in a thoughtful and meaningful way,” stated Robert Martin Company CEO Tim Jones. “We felt the right time was now to work together with WestCOP, a well-respected organization with deep community roots, to strengthen the lines of communication between law enforcement and local youth, so every voice is heard, every opinion respected, and every issue deemed important addressed head-on.”

Robert Martin Company President Greg Berger added, “Working in close partnership with WestCOP reflects our core business philosophy of putting community needs first, which is a perspective forged from over 60 years of making civic-minded philanthropic investments. Local economies are only as strong as the diversity and resiliency of its residents and businesses.”

Bridge Builders is facilitated by WestCOP project manager, Richard “Rick” Lee, a highly decorated, retired White Plains detective and current Archbishop Stepinac High School varsity wrestling coach with over 30 years of hands-on community work confronting high-impact youth issues such as domestic violence, bullying, and school delinquency, among others.

Each community's Bridge Builders Police-Youth Council is primarily comprised of local youth, as well as law enforcement officials, charged with the responsibility of working together to develop a series of activities and projects that foster a greater understanding of each other's perspectives on issues of racial and social injustice, among other goals that come out of on-going constructive dialogue between the two groups.

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In addition, an important factor in the formation of the Bridge Builders initiative is the active participation of three area school districts (Greenburgh, Elmsford and Tarrytown/Sleepy Hollow), as well at-risk youth outreach conducted by several local youth-focused organizations, departments of probation, and local courts.

**About WestCOP:** Westchester Community Opportunity Program is a private, not-for-profit, multi-purpose social services organization operating community programs combating poverty and its adverse effects in the Hudson Valley for over 55 years. WestCOP's mission is to mobilize and efficiently manage resources through partnerships and collaborations to help the low-income and at-risk populations in the Hudson Valley region to achieve greater self-sufficiency.