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FOR INFORMATION: Russell Hokanson, CEO, Seattle King County REALTORS, 425.974-1021
..... or Darla White, Director, Seattle King County First Citizen Award, 425.974-1015
Online firstcitizenevent.org
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Champion for equitable healthcare access named 2021 First Citizen

BELLEVUE, Washington (August 5, 2021) – Benjamin S. Danielson, MD, a revered pediatric physician and dedicated community volunteer, has been selected as the 2021 recipient of the Seattle-King County First Citizen Award. The former medical director of the Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic will be honored at a civic banquet on October 28.



“Dr. Ben,” as he is affectionately known by his patients, is a much-admired tireless advocate and activist for the health and well-being of children and families with low incomes. His passion for equitable health access, his rejection of “symbolic overtures to equity,” and his feeling of being marginalized as the rare Black voice in a position of authority prompted him to resign his position at Odessa Brown, a community clinic of Seattle Children’s.

“Dr. Danielson is a community hero and individual without peers,” proclaimed Dr. Constance W. Rice, president of Very Strategic Group, a University of Washington Regent and member of the Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic. Rice, who was honored as the 1993 First Citizen, applauded this year’s award recipient for devoting more than 30 years of his life “drawing attention to the neediest and most vulnerable within our community. He consistently speaks truth to the powerful by changing the healthcare landscape.” She also described Danielson as a self-effacing healer.

In announcing this year’s recipient, event co-chair and Realtor Cindy Silverstein said Dr. Danielson’s extraordinary commitment to the health and well-being of children and families, especially low-income people of color, his leadership on social justice, and his lifelong commitment to community service made him an especially worthy honoree this year when healthcare and a national reckoning with racism are paramount.

Seattle First Citizen Committee co-chair Trish Coy said Dr. Danielson will be honored at a civic celebration presented by SKCR in partnership with John L. Scott Real Estate and Windermere Real Estate. The event is scheduled for October 28 at the Seattle Art Museum. Tickets may be purchased beginning August 10 at firstcitizenevent.org.

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Lenny Wilkens, another past recipient of the First Citizen Award, shares this year's honoree's unwavering dedication to children. "We know young people are tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, athletes – and citizens. We need to encourage them any way we can."

The Lenny Wilkens Foundation has donated more than \$8 million to the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic, which Wilkens praised for providing health care with dignity. The former NBA player and coach whose storied career included several seasons with the Seattle SuperSonics, said he and Dr. Danielson know children need understanding and encouragement to know they can make a difference. "Ben does that all the time. He touches them. They see that light. It's wonderful the way he helps them believe in themselves."

Danielson served as senior medical director of the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic from 1999-2020. While there, he founded the Washington Medical-Legal Partnership, a nonprofit organization that helps people from underserved communities understand and secure their legal rights regarding safe housing, adequate schooling, medical needs, and more.

Earlier this year, Danielson joined the University of Washington School of Medicine, where he will practice as a pediatrician part time, serve as a clinical professor of pediatrics, and help develop a new program to advance health equity.

As part of his resignation from Odessa Brown, Danielson told his colleagues "You know that it would take a multitude of really bad things to make me leave" as he cited institutional racism and a resistance to change by Seattle Children's leadership. His departure, coupled with pressure from local community leaders, petitions and protests, prompted an independent external investigation and examination of institutional racism, equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Danielson, who was rescued from foster care as a baby, credits the single woman who raised him, with fostering his interest in science. He also cites his work early in his career in small towns around Washington with kindling his belief in the links between social issues and medical issues and the effects on a patient's well-being.

"His work is impressive," said Dr. Edward Taylor, referring to Danielson. "His story is impressive. He's a physician but ultimately an educator. His goal is to educate and care in such a way that we are all well, particularly those who need compassion the most." Taylor, the vice provost and dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs at the U.W. and professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership & Policy, also stated, "Where there are families and kids in need, Ben shows up."

Danielson, the 83rd recipient of the First Citizen Award, pushed for the creation of a second Odessa Brown clinic to serve the Black community that has been displaced from the now majority white Central District. The new facility, located in southeast Seattle's Rainier Valley, is scheduled to open next year. The clinic's namesake was a Black woman who experienced denial of medical services for her health problems. A community organizer who fought for quality health care with dignity for children in the Central District, Brown died of leukemia in 1969, a year before the first clinic opened.

In a 2007 interview, Danielson said, “Odessa Brown was a single mom like my mom and fought for health care for children in the Central District. This place is built on the shoulders of strong women, and the younger versions of these same strong women are working here.”

Danielson was born in Boston and raised in Washington, D.C., and rural Montana by a single mother he describes as “part scientist, part ecologist, and part hippie.” He learned Spanish as his first language while living in Bolivia where his mom, a forester, served in the Peace Corps.

In 1986, Danielson graduated with a BA/BS degree in ethology from Harvard University, and then continued his studies at UW Medicine, earning his medical degree in 1992. Five years later he was certified in pediatrics by the American Board of Pediatrics. His says his childhood experience and involvement in Big Brothers Big Sisters inspired him to pursue a career in pediatrics.

Throughout his career, Danielson has championed efforts to increase access to healthcare and fight against racial inequities. He has facilitated the creation and development of diversity programs and is known for contributing to governmental policy as a member of several health boards.

This year’s First Citizen is a past chair of the Group Health Foundation board. He serves or has served on the Children’s Alliance Public Policy Council, Equal Start Community Coalition, the Health Coalition for Children and Youth, and the boards for the Washington Health Benefit Exchange and United Way of King County.

Danielson, a person *The Seattle Times* described as “a quiet hero of health care,” was the 2018 commencement speaker at the University of Washington. In announcing him as the featured speaker, UW President Ana Mari Cauce said, “Dr. Danielson’s commitment to the people and communities of Seattle is the embodiment of the UW’s great public service mission and we are very proud to count him among our alumni.”

The physician was the keynoter this year at UW’s School of Social Work’s virtual graduation celebration.

For his commitment to children, health equity, and public service, Danielson has garnered many honors. He was named “Citizen of the Year” in 2018 by the Seattle Municipal League, and the 2016 recipient of the Norm Maleng Advocate for Youth Award. Other recognitions include the 2014 Community Partner Award from Wellspring Family Services, 2017 Whole Child Award from the Simms/Mann Institute, and the 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award from UW Medicine.

This year’s First Citizen is the first honoree from the medical community since 1992. That year, Lester R. Sauvage, M.D., a renowned cardiovascular surgeon and founder of a research laboratory that become known as The Hope Heart Institute was recognized.

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About the [First Citizen Award](#)

The Seattle-King County First Citizen Award salutes “giving back” whether by “time, treasure or talent” and civic engagement that enhances the region’s quality of life. Past recipients hail from both the public and private sectors, ranging from humanitarian groups, corporations, charitable, health and educational institutions, to various arts, environmental, and civic organizations. (*See complete list of First Citizens on the next page*).

Since its inception in 1939, the First Citizen Award, believed to be this region’s oldest such recognition, continues to celebrate community leadership, volunteerism, and public service.

The civic banquet to honor the annual recipients is a not-for-profit celebration of civic engagement presented by Seattle King County Realtors® and partners from the real estate community.

About the [Seattle King County REALTORS®](#)

The Seattle King County Realtors® is a nonprofit professional trade association whose goals include promoting ethical business practices and supporting policies that preserve and expand real property rights and housing affordability. Based in Bellevue, SKCR has more than 7,400 members and is a local board of the National Association of Realtors®. The term Realtor® is a registered collective membership mark that identifies a real estate professional who is a member of the National Association of Realtors® and subscribes to its strict Code of Ethics.

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PAST RECIPIENTS, SEATTLE-KING COUNTY FIRST CITIZEN AWARD

1939	Richard Eugene Fuller	1980	James M. Ryan
1940	Dr. Wendell Fifield	1981	C.M. "Mike" Berry
1941	William O. McKay	1982	Dr. Dale E. Turner
1942	Kenneth Colman	1983	T.A. Wilson
1943	Phil Johnson	1984	Victor Rosellini
1944	Children's Orthopedic Hospital	1985	Fredric A. Danz
1945	W. Walter Williams	1986	Robert W. Graham
1946	Royal Brougham	1987	John W. Ellis
1947	John H. Reid	1988	Samuel Stroum
1948	Ernest Skeel	1989	R.C. "Torchy" Torrance
1949	Dr. Raymond Allen	1990	The Rev. Wm. J. Sullivan, S.J.
1950	Thomas M. Pelly	1991	Buster and Nancy Alvord
1951	George Gunn, Jr.	1992	Lester R. Sauvage, M.D.
1952	Henry Broderick	1993	Constance W. Rice, Ph.D.
1953	Frank E. Holman	1994	Phil M. Smart, Sr.
1954	William M. Allen	1995	Mary Gates & Family
1955	Deitrich Schmitz	1996	Stanley O. McNaughton
1956	Rev. A.A. Lemieux	1997	Walter B. Williams
1957	Gordon N. Scott	1998	Jack A. Benaroya
1958	Nat S. Rogers	1999	Paul Brainerd
1959	Mrs. A. Scott Bullitt	2000	The Bullitt Family
1960	Michael Dederer	2001	Herb M. Bridge
1961	Ben E. Ehrlichman	2002	Scott and Laurie Oki
1962	Joseph E. Gandy	2003	Dan and Nancy Evans
1963	George F. Kachlein, Jr.	2004	The McCaw Family
1964	H.W. McCurdy	2005	Jeffrey and Susan Brotman
1965	Edward E. Carlson	2006	Dale Chihuly
1966	Milton Katims	2007	James and Sherry Raisbeck
1967	Mrs. Henry B. Owen	2008	Paul G. Allen
1968	James R. Ellis	2009	Gerard Schwarz
1969	William B. Woods	2010	Hon. Slade Gorton
1970	Norton Clapp	2011	Jamie and Karen Moyer
1971	Glynn Ross	2012	Rotary International Dist. 5030
1972	John D. Ehrlichman	2013	Lenny Wilkens
1973	Dr. Dixy Lee Ray	2014	Hon. Norman B. Rice
1974	Ned and Kayla Skinner	2015	Theodor "Ted" Baseler
1975	Dr. Wm. B. Hutchinson	2016	Phyllis Campbell
1976	Rabbi Raphael Levine	2017	Bill & Jill Ruckelshaus
1977	W.J. "Jerry" Pennington	2018	The Pigott Family
1978	John M. Fluke	2019	Stephen V. Sundborg, SJ
1979	Gordon H. Sweaney	2020	Tomio Moriguchi & Family