

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 7, 2023

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EMILY COURIC
LEADERSHIP FORUM

Pioneering executive and philanthropist, Sandra Wicks Lewis, to speak at April 24, 2023 Emily Couric event

Charlottesville, Virginia – The Emily Couric Leadership Forum will honor Sandra Wicks Lewis with its Women’s Leadership Award at the 2023 annual Emily Couric Leadership luncheon. The award acknowledges an exceptional woman who exemplifies leadership in her profession and her community. During the event the Forum will also award college scholarships to eleven area high school women for their leadership excellence.

Born and raised in Charlottesville, Mrs. Lewis made history in 1959 when she integrated the city schools along with eleven other students in the period known as Massive Resistance. The Governor and city school board, in defiance of a court order, had closed two local schools to prevent integration. Nine-year-old Sandra Wicks, her parents, and the rest of the “Charlottesville Twelve” thought otherwise.

Mrs. Lewis continued to break ground in her educational and professional careers. Among the first class of women to graduate from UVA’s College of Arts and Sciences, she was further the first African American woman to graduate from the College (B.A., Sociology, ’72). In 1980, she received her MBA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

During her successful professional career, Mrs. Lewis worked primarily in financial services. After receiving her MBA, she joined a Merrill Lynch branch in Las Vegas as a Financial Consultant. While there, she became a fully licensed Series 6 and 7 investment advisor and broker. Her final position before retirement was as a private banker with Nations Bank and its successor, Bank of America.

Mrs. Lewis credits her experiences as a child thrust into school integration and the civil rights movement in Charlottesville for her motivation and ability to succeed in management and financial positions at a time when there were few, if any, women and minorities employed in these sectors. She also attributes her success to the influence of her parents, Robert and Elizabeth Wicks; to her husband, Lemuel Lewis (College ’69 and Darden ’72); and to the close-knit African American community in Charlottesville.

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Inspired to give back to her community, Mrs. Lewis has served on numerous non-profit boards, including Leadership Nashville (Tennessee); United Way of South Hampton Roads; and the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, VA. Her philanthropic endeavors also support the University of Virginia, where she has served on the University of Virginia Alumni Association Board of Managers and is currently a charter member of the Advisory Board of the University's Karsh Institute of Democracy. Mrs. Lewis and her husband recently established the Lemuel E. and Sandra Wicks Lewis Bicentennial Scholars Fund for the UVA College of Arts & Sciences.

Several of Lewis's philanthropic initiatives support the Charlottesville community. She established at the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation the Charlottesville 12 Scholarship Fund for graduating students at Charlottesville High School, as well as the donor-advised Robert and Elizabeth Wicks Fund for local community organizations, in honor of her parents.

"We are thrilled to honor Sandra Wicks Lewis, her notable career, and her pioneering and persistent change-making in Charlottesville and beyond," Meredith Gunter, chair of the Forum board said. "Mrs. Lewis's life and accomplishments demonstrate that a talented and motivated woman—even as young as nine—can bring courage and commitment to making our communities better places for all, just as Emily Couric demonstrated in all her endeavors. Mrs. Lewis's career of work and of giving back to the community is the epitome of the leadership we hope to recognize and inspire through our scholarships for young woman leaders from Charlottesville."

About Emily Couric Leadership Forum

The Forum established a scholarship fund at the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation to honor the legacy of the late Virginia State Senator Emily Couric. Through the scholarship and Women's Leadership Award, the Forum encourages all women to adopt an active role in government, public issues, and policy debates affecting their communities, and to inspire young women to pursue activities which will enable them to become effective leaders. For more information visit <https://www.emilycouricleadershipforum.org>

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