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# PRESS RELEASE

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## CDFA Foundation Announces 2024 Class of Caren S. Franzini Fellowship

—CDFA Continues Legacy of Caren S. Franzini Through Five Outstanding Development Finance Professionals —

Columbus, OH — The CDFA Foundation and the Council of Development Finance Agencies are honored to announce the 2024 Class of the Caren S. Franzini Fellowship. Join us in congratulating these five outstanding women:

- **Chris Armitage**, Controller and Operations Manager, OSNI PONCA / PEDCO
- **Victoria Benson**, President, Mustard Seed Hill – Community Ventures
- **Charity Karanja**, Attorney, Butler Snow LLP
- **Brooke Kessler**, Senior Incentives Servicing Officer, New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA)
- **Kay Simmons**, Economic Finance Specialist, Maryland Department of Commerce

“We are excited to recognize Chris, Victoria, Charity, Brooke, and Kay as this year’s class of Caren S. Franzini Fellows. This group of inspirational women represents the best and brightest in the development finance industry, and we are thrilled to welcome them into the CDFA family,” states Toby Rittner, DFCP, President & CEO of CDFA and Chair of the CDFA Foundation. “We are proud to honor the memory of Caren Franzini, my good friend and mentor, through this fellowship. Over the next six months, we will challenge our fellows to explore development finance with the energy, passion, and dedication demonstrated by Caren.”

The **Caren S. Franzini Fellowship** was established in 2017 by the CDFA Board of Directors to recognize the exemplary leadership of Caren Franzini, a past President of CDFA and former CEO of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA). During her career, Caren was dedicated to the advancement of development finance best practices, education, and advocacy.

Recognized by her peers and colleagues as “simply the best,” Caren brought a high level of mastery and insight to her work. Her commitment to the development finance industry is evident in the numerous programs she helped create and the billions of dollars of investment she catalyzed during her tenure at NJEDA. She was equally passionate about building leaders and experts in the field as she was about financing businesses and expanding economic growth and job creation for New Jersey communities.

The Caren S. Franzini Fellowship was created to build leadership positions for women in the development finance field and inspire them to embody Caren’s spirit and professionalism. Franzini Fellows are given the opportunity to work directly with CDFA through a six-month program aimed at developing engaged women leaders in the field of development finance. Each class of Franzini Fellows collaborates on a project of significance to the development finance industry and presents it to a national audience. Collectively, their work showcases expertise in development finance and the power of women-led initiatives.

The **CDFA Foundation** is a national non-profit organization specifically focused on building equitable and inclusive opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and communities working in and engaging with the development finance industry. For more information about the CDFA Foundation, visit [www.cdfafoundation.org](http://www.cdfafoundation.org).

*The CDFA Foundation: Empowering communities by fostering inclusive and equitable access to capital.*

The **Council of Development Finance Agencies** is a national association dedicated to the advancement of development finance concerns and interests. CDFA is comprised of the nation's leading and most knowledgeable members of the development finance community representing public, private, and non-profit entities alike. For more information about CDFA, visit [www.cdfa.net](http://www.cdfa.net).

*CDFA: Advancing Development Finance Knowledge, Networks & Innovation*

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