Nov. 11, 2026

Woods Canopy Fund launches on Veterans Day, inspired by a family legacy of service

Family fund supports five priorities; launch includes $150,000 for Veterans Bridge Home and $100,000 for Center for Veterans Issues

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Lauren Dominique Woods and Eugene A. “Gene” Woods, chief executive officer of Advocate Health, know how much the right support can change a life. Today, they announce the launch of the Woods Canopy Fund, a personal family donor-advised fund created to support the organizations doing that work every day.

Gene grew up in military housing and was the first in his family to go to college. Lauren began her career as a teacher. Both credit family members, educators, mentors and others who believed in them and helped shape their paths.

With an initial commitment of $1 million in giving through 2027, the Woods Canopy Fund will help organizations build on the work they know best: supporting students, creating opportunities, strengthening communities, expanding access to mental health care, and serving veterans and military families. Those efforts reflect its five priorities: education, opportunity, community, mental health and military service. The fund focuses its giving on organizations supporting communities in the Advocate Health footprint.

“Nearly every opportunity I’ve had in life started with someone who believed in me and opened a door,” said Eugene A. “Gene” Woods, chief executive officer of Advocate Health and co-founder of the Woods Canopy Fund. “They gave me chances and saw possibilities in me before I could see them for myself. Lauren and I have both been fortunate to have people like that in our lives. This fund is about gratitude and trying to do the same for someone else.”

“Gene and I have seen how one person’s encouragement, one open door or one moment of belief can change the course of a life. Our hope is that the Woods Canopy Fund will help more people feel seen, supported and empowered to pursue their dreams — and, in time, extend that same sense of possibility to others,” said Lauren Dominique Woods, an executive strategist, doctoral researcher and co-founder of the Woods Canopy Fund.

Launching on Veterans Day honors generations of military service in both families. Lauren’s great-grandfather served in World War I, and her grandfathers served in the Army during World War II and the Korean War. That tradition continues through her cousins, who include both active-duty service members and retired veterans. Gene’s father was a career Navy veteran, and his paternal grandfather served in the Army during World War II.

To mark the launch, the fund is announcing $150,000 for Veterans Bridge Home, which supports service members, veterans and their families across North Carolina and South Carolina, and $100,000 for the Center for Veterans Issues, a Milwaukee-based organization supporting veterans and their families.

Today's launch totals $500,000 to nine organizations, representing initial commitments across the fund's five priorities. Other initial gifts will support organizations helping students succeed in school and prepare for college, connecting families with resources in their communities, and expanding access to mental health care. A $50,000 commitment to WakeMed Foundation will support the development of a new behavioral health hospital that brings mental and physical health care together.

The name Woods Canopy Fund reflects the support that helps people grow. The roots represent the people and values that shape a life. The trunk represents the strength and stability that trusted institutions can provide. The branches represent paths to opportunity, and the canopy offers shelter and room to grow. Lauren and Gene hope to support trusted organizations that help people find the encouragement, connections and care they need to move forward.

Initial Giving Commitments Announced at Launch

Veterans Bridge Home — $150,000

For veterans and military families, coming home can bring a new set of challenges. Veterans Bridge Home connects them with support for housing, employment, physical and mental health care, community connections and the benefits they have earned.

"Lauren and Gene Woods understand what it means to serve their community, and we are truly honored they've chosen to extend that commitment to VBH and the military and veteran families we serve. Their generosity will help families find the opportunities, resources and community connections they need to thrive," said Blake Bourne, chief executive officer of Veterans Bridge Home. "That's a gift that reaches far beyond the families themselves, strengthening the communities we're all proud to call home. We're incredibly grateful for their trust and partnership."

Center for Veterans Issues — $100,000

Based in Milwaukee, Center for Veterans Issues supports veterans and their families through housing and practical services that help them build stability and stay connected to their communities. The gift will support that work.

Communities In Schools — $100,000

Communities In Schools connects students with caring adults and resources to address challenges that can get in the way of learning. Its school-based support helps young people stay engaged in school and pursue their goals.

The $100,000 commitment will provide $25,000 each to four affiliates – Communities In Schools of Chicago; Communities In Schools of Rome-Floyd County, Ga.; Communities In Schools of Central Georgia; and Communities In Schools of Milledgeville/Baldwin County, Ga.

Rhythm & Roots: Soul Amplified — $50,000

The Woods Canopy Fund will provide a $50,000 presenting headliner sponsorship of the Nov. 19 Rhythm & Roots: Soul Amplified event through Foundation For The Carolinas' Foundation For Black Philanthropy. This gift honors Mrs. Carlenia Ivory-Cantey, a longtime Charlotte civic leader, educator and youth advocate.

"This gift is more than a donation. It is hope in action," said Carlenia Ivory-Cantey. "It is an open door for children who may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience educational field trips, receive meals when they are needed most or pursue scholarships that help them reach their dreams."

Funds raised support Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools students, expanding access to experiences and opportunities beyond the classroom.

"We are deeply grateful for this generous gift from the Woods Canopy Fund. This investment will help remove financial barriers and expand access to enriching educational opportunities for students across our school district," said Sonja Gantt, executive director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Foundation. "The gift is especially meaningful because it honors Carlenia Ivory-Cantey, whose dedication to supporting students and families through the CMS Office of Strategic Partnerships has helped create opportunities for countless children. We look forward to continuing our partnership with that team to ensure more students have access to experiences that help them learn, grow and succeed."

Southeast Raleigh Promise — $50,000

Southeast Raleigh Promise works alongside families to create and preserve affordable housing, connect residents with education and economic opportunity, and improve access to health and wellness resources. Its work helps longtime residents thrive as their community grows.

WakeMed Foundation — $50,000

The gift will support WakeMed Foundation's Courage to Confront Crisis Campaign and the development of the WakeMed Garner Mental Health & Well-Being Hospital. The planned 150-bed hospital will expand access to inpatient, outpatient and crisis behavioral health services, bringing mental and physical health care together for patients of all ages.

Through its LinkedIn page and future updates, the Woods Canopy Fund will share stories of the organizations and people it supports, with the hope of inspiring others to give.

About the Woods Canopy Fund

The Woods Canopy Fund is a personal family donor-advised fund established by Lauren Dominique Woods and Eugene A. “Gene” Woods. It supports organizations that expand access to education, opportunity and mental health care, strengthen communities, and serve veterans and military families. Its five priorities are education, opportunity, community, mental health and military service. The fund focuses its giving primarily on organizations serving communities where Advocate Health operates and represents Lauren and Gene’s personal family giving, separate from the health system’s institutional philanthropy. Learn more at woodscanopyfund.com.

Media Contact: Erin Culbert, Erin.Culbert@chernoffnewman.com

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