

MAY 4, 2015

## PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2015

### ■ LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS ■

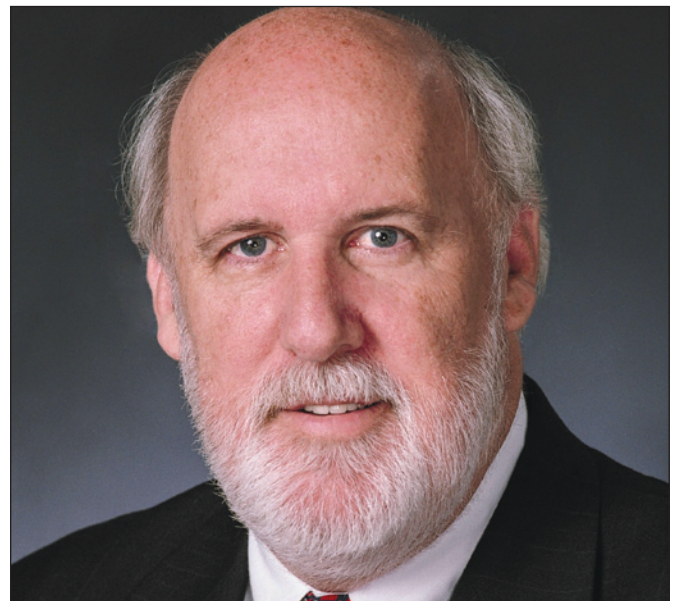
## Peter J. O'Connor

Fair Share Housing Center

**P**eter J. O'Connor has spent a legal career spanning more than four decades fighting for social justice. As an All-State basketball player at Seton Hall Prep, who grew up in South Orange and played in and around Newark, Peter witnessed racial discrimination that harmed his fellow players by limiting their opportunities, especially the ability to reside outside racially segregated areas. After graduating Georgetown University Law Center and experiencing firsthand extreme poverty in Argentina and Peru as a Rotary International Fellow, he returned in 1967 to New Jersey to work as a Legal Services attorney in Camden, where he led the first rent strike in South Jersey.

Peter has dedicated himself exclusively to affordable housing development and litigation that reduces the racial and economic residential segregation of New Jersey. He served as co-counsel for the public interest plaintiffs in *Mount Laurel I* (1975) and *Mount Laurel II* (1983). Those decisions have led to the development of more than 60,000 homes for lower-income families, seniors and people with special needs.

In 1975, O'Connor founded Fair Share Housing Center, a nonprofit advocate of the *Mount Laurel* doctrine. He served as executive director for four decades and con-



tinues to work there on litigation before state agencies and the New Jersey Supreme Court. In 1986, he founded Fair Share Housing Development (FSHD), a nonprofit developer and manager of affordable housing reaching very-low income families and individuals.

Social justice and Peter O'Connor are synonymous. Through his selfless devotion to making New Jersey a fairer place, he has shown that public interest lawyers can have a sustained and profound impact on a state and has shown that the promise of *Mount Laurel* works when given a chance.

—Kevin D. Walsh