

Mary L. Thomas Bio

President & CEO, CFLeads



Mary L. Thomas is President & CEO of CFLeads, a national network of community foundations committed to community leadership. Ms. Thomas brings over 25 years of experience in the nonprofit sector to this role, having previously served as the Chief Operating Officer of The Spartanburg County Foundation and as the Executive Director of the Robert Hett Chapman III Center for Philanthropy. In this dual leadership role, Ms. Thomas was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the foundation and the center, leading its mission, vision, and strategies while translating the Foundation's goals into the overall program of work.

Prior to joining the Foundation in 1998, Ms. Thomas was the Executive Director of The Bethlehem Center, a ministry that serves families in the Highland community of Spartanburg, SC. Ms. Thomas is a graduate of Winthrop University and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in French and Communications. She was an exchange student to France through Lenoir-Rhyne College in 1983 and is a former French teacher in Spartanburg District 7 schools.

Ms. Thomas is a very active leader in the Spartanburg community and has held extensive leadership roles with a host of organizations throughout the area and across the country. She was elected the first African American, female chairman of the board for Apella Health, a division of Spartanburg Regional Health System, The Council on Foundations National Policy and Advocacy Committee, Southeastern Network of African Americans in Black Philanthropy, Converse College Board of Visitors, Vice-Chairman for the Northside Development Group Board of Directors, and the BMW Community Advisory Panel. Her past board service includes: The Southeastern Council of Foundations, The Rotary Club of Spartanburg, CFLeads, Women in Philanthropy, AFL Advisory Board, the Mary Black Health System Women's and Children's Advisory Board, the Mary Black Health System Board of Trustees, and SC ETV Advisory Board. She is also a former Commissioner for The South Carolina State Housing and Finance Authority. Ms. Thomas is a graduate of Leadership Spartanburg, Furman University Diversity Leadership Institute, and Spartanburg Regional Fellows. She is a Past Chair of The SC

Grantmakers, the Spartanburg County Consensus Project, and Spartanburg Communities in Schools. She is also a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc.

Ms. Thomas's many honors include but are not limited to: the Order of the Palmetto issued by the governor of the State of South Carolina which is the highest civilian award anyone can receive in the state, being named Top Three Distinguished Grantmakers by the Council on Foundations in 2014 and, in 2006, being the first African American to win the Council on Foundation's Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking established by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund of New York. She took her prize money of \$10,000 coupled with numerous gifts from the Spartanburg community to establish the Mary L. Thomas Award for Civic Leadership and Community Change Fund. This Fund is managed by The Spartanburg County Foundation, and a deserving leader is recognized annually for their leadership on critical issues in the Spartanburg community. Other honors include: 2018 Whitney M. Young, Jr. Humanitarian Award, the James E. Whitmire Meritorious Award, the Sunrise Civitan Good Citizen Award, the Mary McCloud Bethune Trailblazer Award (presented by the National Council of Negro Women), the 1998 Piedmont Area Girl Scouts Woman of Achievement, a 1997 YMCA Black Achiever, and Junior League Sustainer of the Year. In October of 2019, Ms. Thomas participated in the March of Dimes as a Celebrity Chef, aiding in raising funds for ALL moms and ALL babies. Also, in October of 2019, she participated in Over the Edge Upstate, of which participants rappelled down the side of the 10-story AC Hotel in downtown Spartanburg to raise funds for the Cancer Association of Spartanburg and Cherokee Counties. In 2022, Mary L. Thomas was named the national Sertoman of the Year in recognition of exceptional efforts and contributions to further the Sertoma Mission. She has been a Rotarian for the past 20 years and a past board member of the Spartanburg Rotary Club.

Mary Thomas is a strategic thinker, a fierce leader, a sought out inspirational and motivational speaker and a mentor to many. She was ordained as a minister in 1986 by the Rocky River Baptist Association and is the second female to have that distinction in the Association. She is a member of Cornerstone Baptist Church where she serves as an Elder and Ministry Advisor. Ms. Thomas is the daughter of Mrs. Louise Thomas and Fred Thomas of Spartanburg, SC and is the eldest of four children. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, decorating, cooking, and sports.