

COMMUNITY

News for the Greater Good of Linn County



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Karla Twedt-Ball
President & CEO

NEW PRESIDENT & CEO

Karla Twedt-Ball Poised to Lead Into the Future

Karla Twedt-Ball's tenure as the President & CEO of the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation began on June 1, 2023, but this was by no means the beginning of her service to Linn County. With a wealth of experience and a commitment to our community, Karla is poised to lead the Community Foundation into the next chapter.

Karla grew up in Ankeny, Iowa and earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Iowa. She holds a Master of Public Policy from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, and previously spent time in Chicago working at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research on a community policing evaluation project. Karla eventually moved to Cedar Rapids and served as Executive Director of Churches United before joining the Community Foundation as Program Director in 2007.

Since then, Karla has led the Community Foundation's grantmaking and community impact work, growing the grants team and its ability to support local nonprofits. Because she already has such a thorough understanding of the local nonprofit sector—as well as what it takes to support those organizations—Karla is well positioned to focus on the future.

"We are fortunate to have a very mission-aligned staff and board who are committed to strengthening the community through philanthropy," Karla said. "As an endowed community foundation, we have the opportunity to focus on the future. Our work today helps create a sense of optimism, community, and connectedness, and it also helps create a community foundation of the future, that will be here to address the challenges that the next generations will face."

That work is often collaborative in nature, occupying the space where donors, nonprofits, and community members converge to find a common path forward. It's

a good fit for someone who enjoys learning, building relationships, and creative problem-solving.

"I want to find ways that we can tap into what can hold us together as one community and care for each other and this place," Karla said. "The Community Foundation excels at convening people and ideas to make good things happen, and I want to continue the practice of learning from our donors, nonprofits, board, and staff."

The desire to bring the community together and learn from one another is not surprising for those who are familiar with Karla—or the Community Foundation, for that matter. The organization aims to create a vibrant community now, while simultaneously holding onto a futuristic perspective and helping donors achieve their philanthropic goals; it has long looked to the broader community for inspiration in pursuing that work.

But Karla's perspective and vision don't just align with those nearby, and she's not afraid to look farther afield for new ideas and inspiration. Karla is just finishing board service to the Iowa Council of Foundations, an organization committed to growing philanthropy in Iowa, and serves on the board of The Funders Network, an organization that aims to improve outcomes in a range of categories in communities across the U.S. and Canada. Karla firmly believes that staying connected to trends in the field will help the Community Foundation stay on the cutting edge of using philanthropy as a tool for community development.

Of course, it helps to be in a community where so many are willing to give.

"As I step into this role, I feel so fortunate to inherit a legacy of support for our work—in good times and in bad," Karla said. "The people of Linn County continually demonstrate resilience and generosity, and they value the ability to respond to whatever may lie ahead. I'm grateful to be serving such a selfless community."



Bill Severa

HONORING A LEGACY

Appreciating the Past by Planning for the Future

Bill Severa inherited a lot of things, though not necessarily tangible things. He inherited an appreciation of history, a passion for giving back, and a love for the Cedar Rapids community. For those that knew Bill, it was no surprise to learn that he combined those ideals to create an impactful philanthropic legacy when he passed away at age 96 earlier this year.

Like many in Eastern Iowa, Bill came from a family of Czech immigrants. His grandfather emigrated from Czechoslovakia and found success in Cedar Rapids, giving him the means to support others in search of opportunity. He funded the establishment of orphanages in his home country, and after attending a local high school graduation and meeting a Czech valedictorian who couldn't afford college, he took it upon himself to establish a scholarship.

“He was a meticulous planner, and it was important to him to leave something behind not only for his family, but also his community.”

- Richard Severa
Son of Bill Severa

By the time Bill came of age, he felt a deep sense of connection to Cedar Rapids. Drawing from his grandfather's example, he generously supported Coe College, the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, and several other organizations that were meaningful to him and the Severa family history. Later in life, he began looking for ways to continue that support after his passing.

“He was a meticulous planner, and it was important to him to leave something behind not only for his family, but also his community,” said Richard, Bill's son. Richard and his sister will take over as advisors for the donor-advised fund Bill established at the Community Foundation. “He was very specific, and he wanted to be sure everything was carried out in the way he intended.”

Bill established his donor-advised fund with great patience and care, making contributions every quarter for several years until it reached the level he had set as a goal. It is also endowed, which means it will serve as a permanent source of support for nonprofits serving Linn County.

“Bill had a clear vision for his philanthropy, and it has been rewarding to help ensure his estate is serving the community as he intended,” said Laura Booth, Director of Family Philanthropy. “His gifts will provide long-term support for local nonprofits, preserving history and creating opportunity.”

Besides the donor-advised fund, Bill also took out a life-insurance policy and named the Community Foundation as its beneficiary. When Bill passed away in February, the policy established an endowed, designated fund that will make annual distributions to The History Center.

“My father lived in Cedar Rapids almost his whole life, and he felt a deep connection to the community,” Richard said. “Giving back was certainly very important to him, and I hope my sister and I can uphold that tradition.”

Endow Iowa Tax Credit Program Wait List Cleared

The Endow Iowa tax credit program – a program that allows taxpayers to receive an Iowa state income tax credit equal to 25 percent of the value of a gift to an endowed charitable held at a qualified community foundation – has inspired gifts to endowed funds held at community foundations across the state since 2003. The program is administered by the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA).

Over the last several years, the demand for tax credits outpaced the amount available. In response, the following changes have occurred:

- Since January 1, 2023, the maximum credit per taxpayer is \$100,000 (or \$200,000 per couple). This is a reduction from the previous limit of \$300,000 per taxpayer (or \$600,000 per couple).
- In May 2023, a legislative bill, HF 710, was signed into law by Governor Reynolds providing a one-time allocation of \$7 million to the Endow Iowa tax credit program to clear the wait list. Donors previously on wait lists for 2023 and 2024 will now receive 2023 tax credits.
- As of July 1, 2023, IEDA will no longer maintain a wait list for future tax year credits. Applications will not be accepted once the credits allocated for that year have been exhausted.
- Beginning January 2024, tax credits will be distributed on a first come, first served basis. Donors are encouraged to give early each tax year going forward.

If you have questions about how these changes may impact your charitable giving, please contact Christi Smeed, Development Services Manager, at 319.774.2377 or christi.smeed@gcrf.org.

For more information and updates, visit iowaeda.com/endow-iowa/.

New Website Helps Connect Donors to Community Needs

The Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation recently unveiled a new website. The new site, still at gcrf.org, offers many new features and resources.

“A few of our goals were to streamline information for users, strengthen our identity, help donors easily connect to community needs, and to make it inclusive with accessibility options,” said Corinne Ramler, Vice President of Marketing and Communications.

The site features an online giving hub called the Nonprofit Giving Center, where donors can search for charitable needs and opportunities in Linn County. Users can search for a nonprofit organization by name, or they can search by a topic they are interested in supporting to see the nonprofits in our area that provide those services. Nonprofit organizations will manage the information on their page, highlighting how the community can support them. For organizations that hold funds at the Community Foundation, donors will be able to contribute to those funds directly from the Giving Center.

In addition, a Nonprofit Calendar has been added for community members to see upcoming fundraising events and other ways to support nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations serving Linn County are invited to add events and fundraisers to the calendar.

In addition to new content and additional resources for donors and nonprofits, a new suite of accessibility features ensures all community members can use the website. Visitors can select from a range of features to improve their experience including language translation, as well as options for users who are visually impaired, motor impaired, dyslexic, color blind, or epileptic to name a few.

“The new website makes it easier than ever to find the tools you need to make a difference in the community,” Corinne said. “The enhanced browsing experience helps users learn and explore opportunities to deepen their impact.”

MICRO Small Business Loan Program Moves to ECICOG

In 2015, a local couple came to the Community Foundation with an idea. Entrepreneurs themselves, they wanted to support new and growing businesses in the area through accessible loans. The idea was a seed that grew into MICRO, an award-winning program that provides low-interest loans and other resources to entrepreneurs in Cedar Rapids.

MICRO was made possible by the many nonprofit organizations, governmental groups, and donors who offered financial and administrative support. The program earned the 2018 Secretary’s Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships, presented by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Council on Foundations.

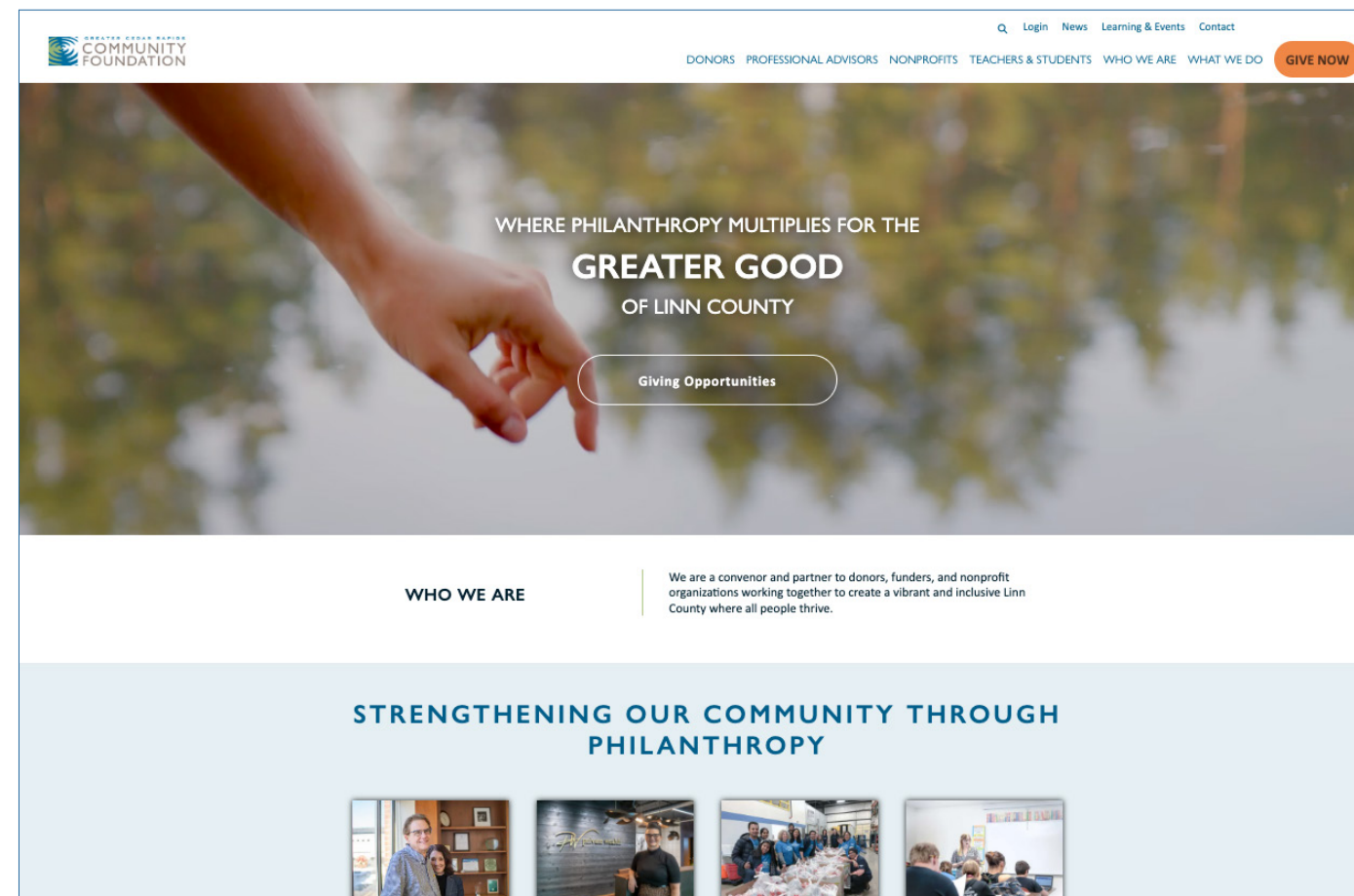
To date, MICRO has provided 24 loans totaling over \$238,000. This year, the administration of MICRO has moved to the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG), who will accept applications directly, award loans, and accept donor contributions to the program.

“As a convener and fundraiser, the Community Foundation was excited to be a part of bringing this project to life,” said Jean Brenneman, CFO. “The revolving loan fund is now established and sustainable, so it fits well into ECICOG’s suite of opportunities for small business owners.”



Loan recipients will continue to be supported by resources and business coaching offered by the Small Business Development Center at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids Public Library, and SCORE programs.

To learn more about MICRO, visit ecicogrlf.org.



Nonprofit Know-How Highlights Authentic Leadership

On Wednesday, May 10, local nonprofit professionals gathered at the Community Foundation for Nonprofit Know-How: Authentic Leadership to Improve Employee Wellbeing. More than 45 people attended the event, which was led by Emily Blomme, CEO of Foundation 2 Crisis Services. Emily has led Foundation 2 since 2015 and has received a number of awards and recognitions for her leadership.

The May event focused on the historical philosophy of leadership and how it has changed over time. The group discussed the importance of leading from a place of vulnerability and encouraging employees to come to work as their whole selves.

“Emily’s presentation was impactful to everyone in the room,” said Carrie Walker, Director of Learning. “The components she identified as essential to leading with authenticity—trust, vulnerability, empathy, and courage, and the examples she shared from her work at Foundation 2 Crisis Services and throughout her career, really brought home the opportunity we each have in front of us to create authentic, inclusive workplaces.”



Presenter: Emily Blomme, CEO, Foundation 2 Crisis Services



SUPPORTING THE FUTURE

Grant to Catherine McAuley Center Supports Strategic Planning

You might say the past few years have been a whirlwind for the Catherine McAuley Center. Besides the pandemic and derecho, the organization also wrapped up a capital campaign, moved into a new building, and experienced exponential demand for services when hundreds of Afghan refugees arrived in Iowa. Still, while the organization responded to each new challenge, they managed to stay focused on the future.

Back in 2014, the Center developed a strategic plan that carried them through the next seven years, culminating in a capital campaign and a new facility. By the summer of 2020, that campaign had come to a close and the organization had accomplished the goals outlined in the plan, creating a sense of optimism and momentum—even as pandemic challenges loomed. But then, just four weeks after moving into their new space, a derecho

tore through Eastern Iowa, damaging nearly every property in Linn County, including the new Catherine McAuley Center.

“Our first leadership meeting was in the hallway of the only undamaged area of the building,” said Paula Land, Executive Director.

Even with a damaged facility, organizational leadership moved forward with outlining how the Center could use their expanded space to serve the community. With help from a \$20,000 Organization Support Grant from the Community Foundation, they set out to develop a strategic plan and the organization’s leadership structure. Throughout the capital campaign, the Center had engaged with a wide range of stakeholders—the strategic planning process would be no different.

“We have a much larger staff now, so we had to engage with them on a different level this time,” said Peggy Rubero, Director of Human Resources & Organizational Development. “We created focus groups to hear from not only staff, but also clients, other agencies, community members, and even former staff.”

“As we’re presented with new challenges and opportunities, we want to be able to respond to those while connecting the work back to our strategic plan.”

- Paula Land
Executive Director

“This is meant to be a living document, not set in stone,” Paula said. “As we’re presented with new challenges and opportunities, we want to be able to respond to those while connecting the work back to our strategic plan.”

Of course, a strategic plan is nothing without a strong team to carry it out. After years of growth,

the Center saw a need to step back and evaluate their leadership team structure. The grant funding allowed them to engage a consultant who could provide a valuable outside perspective, helping staff think about who they are, how they interact with the community, and where there might be room for growth and improvement. As a result, the Center reorganized some of their programs and staff to provide clearer sets of responsibilities as the team engages with the new plan.

Staff will also benefit as individuals, as one of the plan’s priorities is building staff skills and knowledge. “We’re excited to be more intentional about growth and not just responding to what is thrown at us,” Paula said. “And we’re also committed to career development opportunities for our staff. As a team, we’re focused not just on what we’re doing, but how we’re doing it, and that feels really good.”

To learn more about grantmaking at the Community Foundation, visit gcrf.org.





ROOTED IN SERVICE

Elizabeth Cwik Retires

After more than 15 years with the Community Foundation, Elizabeth Cwik began her retirement on May 25, 2023.

Elizabeth joined the Community Foundation as a Program Assistant in March of 2008, just a few months before the 2008 Flood. She jumped right in to help support nonprofits through grantmaking in response to the disaster. Prior to this, she served for 24 years as a pastoral associate in education, social concerns outreach, and pastoral care at Saint Pius X Church in Cedar Rapids.

Serving on the Grants Team in various roles, Elizabeth provided guidance and support for nonprofits applying for grants. She was eventually promoted to Senior Program Officer and helped steer the Community Foundation's grantmaking.

"Elizabeth was an invaluable colleague and mentor over many years as a member of the Grants Team," said Rochelle Naylor, Senior Program Officer. "She helped develop the Community Foundation's grantmaking policies and practices into what they are today."

Elizabeth has always worked tirelessly to serve the communities she loves, and she is seen by many as an expert on Linn County's challenges, organizations, programs and services. Her curiosity and commitment made her a valuable asset to the Community Foundation and the larger community.

In 2022, Elizabeth changed roles at the Community Foundation and joined the Development Team as a part-time Senior Development Officer. In this role, she provided support and guidance to businesses wanting to make an impact through philanthropy.

"We will certainly miss Elizabeth," said Karla Twedt-Ball, President & CEO. "Our staff feel so fortunate to have enjoyed her caring presence and commitment to our community, and we wish her well."

Multiply Your Giving to Linn County Public School Classrooms

The Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation is once again partnering with DonorsChoose to match donations to classroom projects of teachers in Linn County public schools. The one-to-one match begins on August 1, 2023.

DonorsChoose is a national nonprofit, founded in 2000, that allows teachers to crowdsource funding for supplies, projects and equipment. Donors can give to schools in their area, to teachers they know, or to any classroom with an unmet need. The Community Foundation has partnered with DonorsChoose since 2015.

The Community Foundation's Fund for Educational Excellence, which provides a portion of the matching grants, was established in 1990 to support teachers in creative, innovative, and effective classroom projects. Additional support comes from the Peggy Fashimpaur Kahr Fund for Arts Education and the Greater Good Fund. Currently, \$25,000 in matching grant funds are available through DonorsChoose for the 2023-24 school year.

To view a list of classroom requests from teachers in Linn County, visit donorschoose.org.

Scholarships Support Linn County Students

This spring, the Community Foundation awarded more than \$155,000 in scholarships to 95 Linn County students entering a wide range of professional fields. Awardees include graduates from 22 area high schools. These scholarships are made possible by the generosity of donors who support education through the Community Foundation.



Bernadette Gladish, Grants and Programs Manager, presents a scholarship to a student at Washington High School.

To view the 2023 scholarship recipients, visit gcrf.org.

Now Accepting Spirit of Minnie Rubek Submissions

On Thursday, September 14, the Community Foundation will host the Nonprofit Party at the Market. The Nonprofit Party is an annual celebration of local nonprofit professionals and the incredible work they do to strengthen our community. This year's party is being held at NewBo City Market in Cedar Rapids from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. All nonprofit staff are invited to attend.

Through the Spirit of Minnie Rubek, the party also recognizes nonprofit employees who have truly gone above and beyond in their service to the community. Organizations based in Linn County are invited to honor one employee that exemplifies the spirit of one of our community's great unsung heroes. Visit gcrf.org for the submission form.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Grant Deadline**
Tuesday, September 12, 2023
4:30 p.m. CST
Visit gcrf.org to view grant opportunities.
- **Nonprofit Party at the Market**
Thursday, September 14, 2023
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
At NewBo City Market
Nonprofit professionals can RSVP at gcrf.org/events.
The Spirit of Minnie Rubek honoree submissions are due
Tuesday, August 8, 2023.

STAY CONNECTED! Follow us for news, updates and stories about the impact of philanthropy in Linn County.

