

COMMUNITY

News for the Greater Good of Linn County



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BUILDING AN
INCLUSIVE FUTURE:
A Message from our
President & CEO

Here at the Community Foundation, our 75th anniversary celebrations are well under way. We hope you'll join us in August for our events and other ways to honor this milestone. As an endowed foundation, we have a habit of looking to the future, but we're grateful for the opportunity to reflect on how we got here.



That said, while we celebrate our past, we're also keeping an eye on the future. Later this year, the Community Foundation will be finalizing a new strategic plan, and our goal is to hear from as much of the community as possible before doing so. To ensure we're here for all of Linn County, we want to know what strengths, opportunities, and challenges you see in our organization and community.

If you haven't already, please consider taking our brief survey at gcrf.org to provide input on how we can continue to strengthen Linn County. If you've already taken the survey, consider sharing it with your network—we're especially interested in hearing from those who haven't worked with us in the past.

The Community Foundation strives to keep the people of Linn County at the center of our work, and hearing from the community helps us do just that. Thank you for partnering with us to strengthen our community.

Karla Twedt-Ball

Karla Twedt-Ball
President & CEO



TAKE THE
SURVEY

MURAL TO MARK
75 YEARS
Adding Vibrancy Through
Public Art

When the Community Foundation began looking for ways to celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2024, one of the biggest ideas was a mural. Besides adding some vibrancy to the building, a mural could also pay homage to those who make our community thrive.

The idea seemed almost too big—until the Community Foundation teamed up with Murals & More.

A volunteer-run nonprofit, Murals & More has cultivated public art in Cedar Rapids since 2011. The organization has led the development of 15 projects in the downtown area and provided support for many more.

“Public art is one of the many cultural identity markers of a community,” said Nick Ludwig, Co-Chair of Murals & More. “For visitors and residents alike, art that is accessible to all can lead to a sense of belonging and build upon social cohesion, as everyone has the opportunity to experience it.”

Murals & More connected the Community Foundation to Downtown Cedar Rapids, which provides funding for such projects. Downtown Cedar Rapids—an organization that aims to foster economic development in the area—has supported at least six large murals in recent years as recommended by the Downtown SSMID Commission.

“Murals and public art contribute to the success of a community by enhancing the aesthetic appeal of public spaces, making them more inviting,” said Jennifar Bassett, Downtown Cedar Rapids Program Manager. “Being a part of and supporting a milestone like this is exciting. This mural project not only marks a significant milestone but also serves as a symbol of unity, resilience, and shared history within Cedar Rapids.”

With funding from Downtown Cedar Rapids and support from Community Foundation board, past board and staff members, the big idea started to seem possible. After a highly competitive process guided by Murals & More, the group selected Scott Takes of Underground Art Studios.

For more than 20 years, Scott has worked as a Cedar Rapids-based artist, airbrushing anything and everything for clients



Local artist and muralist Scott Takes at his studio, Underground Arts Studios, in downtown Cedar Rapids.

around the country. Besides his obvious talent, part of Scott's appeal to customers is his ability to work in a variety of styles. His studio is full of motorcycle parts bearing everything from a Janis Joplin portrait to art deco designs. Scott has also already painted two murals in Cedar Rapids—a drag-racing cow in Oakhill Jackson and a pensive, cosmic Lucille Ball in Kingston Village.

“I spend most of my day alone in my studio, but I love being downtown, having people all around me,” Scott said. “It's great to work with people from all over, but I love getting to create things that people around here will see and ask questions about.”

Scott worked with Murals & More and the Community Foundation to develop ideas that represent local nonprofits and the community they serve. The mural is currently being installed and will be officially unveiled at the Community Foundation's 75th anniversary celebration on August 7.

“After a lot of coordination and planning, we're very excited to be able to present this mural to the community,” said Community Foundation Vice President of Marketing and Communications Corinne Rahe. “Scott is so talented, and we're grateful he has helped us bring some vibrancy to our little corner of Linn County.”

Join Us in Celebrating 75 YEARS 1949-2024 of Impact

Events:



WILLIAM QUARTON HERITAGE SOCIETY CELEBRATION

Members of the William Quarton Heritage Society are invited to join us at the Cedar Rapids Public Library on August 7, for a celebration prior to the Block Party.

WHO: William Quarton Heritage Society members

WHAT: Reception and program celebrating 75 years of philanthropy

WHEN: Wednesday, August 7, doors open at 9:30 a.m. for reception; Program from 10:15 to 11 a.m.

WHERE: Cedar Rapids Public Library, Whipple Auditorium, downtown Cedar Rapids

WHY: To celebrate William Quarton Heritage Society members who are leaving a legacy through philanthropy

RSVP by August 1 at gcrf.org.



BLOCK PARTY AND MURAL UNVEILING

On August 7, we're celebrating our 75th anniversary with a Block Party—and everyone is invited! Join us in our parking lot for a free lunch while we unveil the new mural on our building.

WHO: Open to the public

WHAT: Free lunch from local food trucks and the unveiling of our new mural

WHEN: Wednesday, August 7 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

WHERE: The Community Foundation parking lot at the corner of 3rd Street and 4th Avenue SE, downtown Cedar Rapids

WHY: To celebrate 75 years of strengthening Linn County through philanthropy

RSVP by August 1 at gcrf.org.



FREE ADMISSION DAY TO LOCAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Celebrating our 75th anniversary isn't just about us—it's also about the many nonprofits we've partnered with over the years to help make Linn County a healthy and vibrant community. To help you experience some of these amazing organizations, we're sponsoring a free admission day to various arts and culture nonprofits. Head out on Saturday, August 10 to experience world-class art, learn about a culture, or explore local history. Find hours and more information at gcrf.org.

Participating Organizations:

- Abbe Creek School Museum
- African American Museum of Iowa
- Alburnett Community Historical Society
- Brucemore
- Cedar Rapids Museum of Art
- Coggon Community Historical Society/Clemons House & Historical Hall
- CSPS
- Granger House Museum
- Marion Heritage Center & Museum
- National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library
- The History Center
- Ushers Ferry Historic Village



Other Ways To Support:

MAKE A GIFT OF \$75 OR MORE TO THE GREATER GOOD FUND

Consider a gift of \$75 or more to the Community Foundation's unrestricted Greater Good Fund in celebration of its anniversary. This unrestricted fund supports the competitive grant programs at the Community Foundation. We can't predict the future, but gifts to this fund provide funding for nonprofits to meet our community's greatest needs and opportunities as they arise. Visit gcrf.org to make a gift.



MAKE A GIFT

ORDER APPAREL BY RAYGUN

We've partnered with RAYGUN to develop a variety of t-shirt options. Purchase a shirt and help us celebrate! Visit gcrf.org to order.



ORDER A SHIRT





NONPROFIT WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Labor Shortage Impacting Local Services

In 2021, the National Council of Nonprofits found that nonprofit workforce shortages were “intolerably high.” In 2023, the Council conducted a survey of more than 1,600 nonprofits to find if workforce shortages were still impacting organizations and the communities they serve.

Survey results clearly showed that this issue has not gone away. More than half of nonprofits have more vacancies now than they did before the pandemic. Nearly a third reported longer waiting lists for services. Small, rural, and human service organizations have been the most impacted.

Local Challenges

To prepare for creating a new strategic plan, this spring the Community Foundation conducted a survey of nonprofits serving Linn County. The local data aligns with national trends.

Employee recruitment and retention challenges are impacting more than 70% of local organizations; more than 86% noted that demand for services exceeds current capacity. Given current trends, few see these challenges going away: 78% expect to be impacted by workforce shortages in the next five years, and 95% expect demand for services to exceed capacity.

Conversations with local nonprofit leaders reveal even more alignment with the national data. Foundation 2 Crisis Services, which provides various crisis and counseling supports, saw a significant increase in demand for services at the onset of the pandemic.

“A lot of people sought help for the first time during the pandemic,” said Emily Blomme, CEO. “Both volume and acuity have increased since pre-pandemic—we’re seeing more people at risk of suicide or in need of stabilization. During the pandemic, a lot of great staff stepped up to take extra shifts, but that led to significant burnout.”

How Nonprofits Are Responding

Over the last few years, many have left emotionally taxing roles like crisis response for jobs that pay more, come with less stress, and require no specialized skills or knowledge. In response, organizations like Foundation 2 have raised wages and looked for new ways to increase employee satisfaction and wellbeing. An increased focus on employee benefits, like floating mental health days, hybrid work where possible, and flexible dollars for employee insurance have been effective.

The Arc of East Central Iowa, which serves people with disabilities and their families, notes that while the workforce shakeup has subsided to a degree, the challenge is not gone.

“We have good retention, but we haven’t recovered from COVID losses,” said Theresa Lewis, Executive Director. Current staffing challenges are having a very real impact on The Arc’s ability to pursue its mission. “Before the pandemic we didn’t really maintain a waitlist; we now have 120 families waiting for services. We don’t have the staff needed to meet this demand.”

Restrictions placed on funds can make it more difficult to respond to such challenges. Often, gifts or grants to nonprofits are for a specific use. Funders and donors are sometimes reluctant to cover administrative expenses, and government contracts do not accurately reflect the actual cost of program delivery.

How Philanthropy Can Help

Of course, there is more to the issue than salaries and benefits, and there remains room for creative approaches through philanthropy. Community outreach and support for local educational groups, for example, can help build the pool of qualified workers and generate interest in nonprofit careers.

In recent years, the Community Foundation has also worked to build the Greater Good Fund, which supports competitive grant programs. These grants support local programs and projects and help build the capacity of organizations serving Linn County. The Greater Good Fund now also provides general operating support grants, which equip organizations with the flexible funding they need.

The Community Foundation has long been a convener on issues of broad community importance. In the months ahead, we look forward to working with local nonprofits and donors to better understand and respond to the changing workforce landscape. By finding creative ways for philanthropy to help meet community needs, we can help create a stronger, more agile nonprofit sector, which in turn leads to a healthier, happier Linn County.

LINN COUNTY NONPROFITS

70% report being impacted by workforce challenges

86% say demand exceeds current capacity

64% need more training opportunities for board and staff

Kristi Columbus Joins Community Foundation as Vice President of Development

On August 3, Kristi Columbus will join the Community Foundation as Vice President of Development. Kristi brings to the role more than 26 years of fundraising experience.



Kristi comes to us from Cornell College, where she most recently served as Associate Vice President. Kristi helped lead the college’s largest ever campaign, which raised more than \$118 million. She previously served as Director of Major and Planned Giving at Mt. Mercy University and began her fundraising career at the Xavier High School Foundation in 1998.

A life-long Iowan, Kristi earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Cornell College.

Welcome, Kristi!

DonorsChoose Match Increased

The Community Foundation is once again partnering with DonorsChoose to support educators in Linn County. Beginning August 1, gifts made to local classrooms through DonorsChoose will be matched by the Community Foundation. This year’s match has been increased from \$25,000 to \$30,000. The Community Foundation has partnered with DonorsChoose since 2015. In that time, we have matched more than \$200,000 in gifts. To find eligible classroom projects, visit DonorsChoose.org and search for Linn County.



VAN METER FOSTERS A CULTURE OF GIVING BACK

An Employee-Driven Approach to Philanthropy

Over the last 96 years, Van Meter has grown into one of the region's top distributors of electrical components. In more recent years, the company has emerged as a model for engaged corporate philanthropy.

Founded in 1928 in downtown Cedar Rapids, Van Meter now has 850 employee-owners in 25 locations throughout the Midwest. As the company has grown, so has its commitment to its employees and the communities they live in. In 2005, Van Meter established a donor-advised fund at the Community Foundation to make it easier to give back to those communities.

That year, Van Meter granted more than \$41,000 from the fund. In 2008, Van Meter's giving increased significantly in response to the flood.

"Times were tough for a lot of people," said Danielle Monthei, Community Impact Program Manager. "But Van Meter's thought was, 'times are tough—double down.'"

In this case, 'double down' is not figurative language. Van Meter granted \$97,000 from the donor-advised fund in 2007, compared to \$208,000 in 2008. Employees even moved to a new office three weeks ahead of schedule so displaced Alliant Energy workers could use their office space.

In 2022, as Van Meter closed in on \$2 million granted through its donor-advised fund, the company set out to formalize community impact efforts and once again double down. With a staff member dedicated to community impact and a

committee of employee volunteers, the company set up a process to get everyone involved in giving back.

Van Meter employees, no matter where they're located, can recommend an organization to the community impact committee. The committee meets once a month to review requests, learn about the issues and organizations, and award grants.

"Van Meter started in Cedar Rapids, but we're also in Ottumwa, Duluth, Sioux City," Danielle said. "Just because we have three employees in Keokuk doesn't mean we're not going to be a part of that community. We want to know the local organizations and issues and show up for them just as if we had 250 people there."

Van Meter's unique approach goes above and beyond asking employees for grant recommendations. For the last 65 years, Kathy Etscheidt has worked in accounts payable, writing checks to vendors and grantees. She now also volunteers her time to serve on the community impact committee.

"For most of the grants we make, I notify the employee so they can personally deliver the news," Kathy said. "They like to go in and hand them a letter and talk to them. It's very personal for them."

As a 100% employee-owned company, the employee-driven approach to philanthropy is a natural fit. It gets employees engaged in the process, but it also helps build relationships within their communities. This can make it much easier to identify and respond to challenges. When one employee heard that students at Cedar Rapids' Wilson Middle School couldn't wash their clothes, Van Meter's network of employees, customers and volunteers took action. Within days, the school had a new washer and dryer hooked up and ready for student use.

It is a testament to Van Meter's culture that employees are not just recommending grants but are actively working alongside one another to strengthen their communities. Van Meter employees get eight hours of paid time off to use for volunteering. Other efforts bring

large groups of employees together for events or projects, sometimes tapping into the company's other resources.

"I'm of the opinion that giving our time is just as valuable," Danielle said. "Last year, one of our priorities was using our trucks to help."

The company helped move nearly 40 semi loads of food, furniture and other necessities for local nonprofits. With CDL drivers on staff, Van Meter could also establish a partnership with the Iowa Giving Crew to provide free food for families to cook at home on Thanksgiving. Last year, this program provided meals to 1,500 families.

Encouraging employees to volunteer their time and talents—and connecting them with opportunities to do

so—has helped Van Meter foster a culture that values giving.

"Volunteering is important to me and my family," said Freight Administrator Amy Korsmo, who coordinates Van Meter's Salvation Army bell ringers each year. "Whether I'm ringing with my sons or helping with my husband at Watermelon Days, I'm proud to support Van Meter's culture of giving."

Building that culture of giving is the real goal of Van Meter's philanthropy. Though their funding priorities are kids and veterans, a look at their grant history reveals few boundaries to their giving.

"It's really important to the decision makers on the committee to support what our employee-owners care about," Danielle said. "Our process is intentionally fluid. We have some guidelines and precedents, but we have the opportunity to make a difference in nearly all requests."

“It’s really important to the decision makers on the committee to support what our employee-owners care about. Our process is intentionally fluid.”
- Danielle Monthei,
Community Impact Program Manager



CONNECTING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity Center Connects Job Seekers to Resources and Employment

When the Cedar Rapids Public Library flooded in 2008, operations moved to the westside location in Westdale Mall. The increased focus on the westside branch and its services made it clear that this part of the community needed a permanent, well-rounded library. In 2013—the same year the new downtown location opened—the Ladd Library opened on Williams Boulevard.

More than a decade later, the Ladd Library has grown into a valued resource for nearby residents. When the Opportunity Center opened in Ladd in 2019, the library became a place where people could access a wide range of additional resources.

“The core focus of the Opportunity Center is to provide resources to the community to support employment and job training goals,” said Erin Maeder, Opportunity Center Program Coordinator. Through resume workshops, computer skills classes, mock interviews, and career fairs, the Opportunity Center helps people find employment.

Most clients are seeking help with completing job applications or writing a resume. Others are not sure what careers they are interested in or how their skills will translate to the workforce. The Opportunity Center can connect those people with assessments and then job training programs.

These services can have a big impact on the local economy; many employers struggle to find qualified people to fill their open positions.

Unfortunately, those visiting the Opportunity Center sometimes have more pressing needs.

“A lot of times people are facing multiple challenges,” Erin said. “I work closely with a lot of organizations to get people connected to essential resources first, so we can get to a point where we focus on employment goals.”

Erin can connect visitors to resources because of strong partnerships with other local organizations. The Opportunity Center itself is a collaboration between the Library, Kirkwood Community College, United Way of East Central Iowa, HACAP, and the City of Cedar Rapids. Other partners include IowaWorks, Goodwill, Catherine McAuley Center, DeltaV Code School, and the Financial Wellness Center at Horizons.



Erin Maeder, Opportunity Center Program Coordinator

The Opportunity Center is also connected to 70+ service providers via My Care Community. This collaboration allows agencies to make digital referrals to one another and see what services an individual might qualify for. The Opportunity Center might connect a client to unemployment benefits, job training, or tuition assistance, but also healthcare, housing, childcare, or other services through My Care Community.

The Opportunity Center refers more people to the Catherine McAuley Center (CMC) than anywhere else. Among other services, CMC provides immigrants and refugees with job coaching, workplace English classes, and connection to employers.



Jon Dayton (left) speaking with an attendee at a computer skills workshop.

“Employment staff meet with clients both at the CMC offices as well as onsite at the Opportunity Center,” said Renae Popelar, Interim Director of Refugee & Immigrant Services. “We provide these clients with resume building, application assistance, and employer outreach services to promote stability.”

This partnership is especially important in the Westdale area, where many immigrants and refugees live.

“This area is known for being a resource desert,” Erin said. “There are so many low-income families around here, so placing the Opportunity Center here was strategic. The new Westside Library will be just a few blocks away, and that was very intentional.”

The Cedar Rapids Public Library is currently raising funds for the new facility and expects to break ground this fall. In the Ladd Library, the Opportunity Center is currently in converted staff offices. The space has served its purpose, but it is less than ideal.

“The Opportunity Center will be easier to find in the new building,” Erin said. “We will also have more small office spaces, where employers and community partners can work one-on-one with clients.”

More than fifty people have used the Opportunity Center each month over the last year. With a more visible and versatile space, library staff hope to increase that number in the future.

Scholarships Awarded

Congratulations to the dozens of students who received scholarships through the Community Foundation in 2024. Totalling more than \$124,000, these scholarships are an investment in our community’s future. Scholarships are made possible by the generosity of donors who support education through the Community Foundation. To view the 2024 scholarship recipients, visit gcrf.org.



Claire English, Donor Relations Associate, presents scholarships to students at Alburnett High School.

Learning Cohort for Small and Grassroots Nonprofits Announced

Nonprofit staff, board members, and volunteers of small and grassroots nonprofit organizations serving Linn County are invited to participate in a new three-session learning cohort in the fall of 2024. To learn more and register, visit gcrf.org. Registration is required by Friday, September 6.



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Where philanthropy multiplies for the
GREATER GOOD of Linn County.

CELEBRATING



We're getting ready to
celebrate!
We hope you'll join us!

Block Party Celebration

*Wednesday, August 7, 2024
11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Program at noon.*

Join us in the parking lot behind our building as we celebrate 75 years of strengthening our community through philanthropy! Enjoy a free lunch, short program, and the unveiling of a new mural on the east side of our building!

Free Admission Day to Local Cultural Institutions

Saturday, August 10, 2024

Enjoy a day exploring a variety of arts and cultural sites in Linn County and let the Community Foundation pay for your admission! Visit gcrf.org to view participating sites and hours.

Both events are open to anyone who cares about the past and future of Linn County, Iowa!

RSVP by August 1 at gcrf.org.

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

