

COMMUNITY

News for the Greater Good of Linn County



7 | Building Connections to Tackle Food Insecurity



GREATER CEDAR RAPIDS
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

INSIDE



2 | How Cultural Nonprofits Keep Linn County Thriving



4 | Hilery Livengood and Ben Fashimpaur Give Back



9 | Match Helps Build Inclusive Classrooms

CHALLENGES IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR:

A Message from our President & CEO



As we approach the end of the year, I want to bring your attention to some challenges that our nonprofit organizations are facing. Recently, the Community Foundation hosted a listening session of nonprofits representing various sectors, and all are facing funding challenges. Many human service organizations are experiencing reductions in state and federal funding. At the same time, arts and culture organizations are beginning to see fewer gifts, as donors focus on meeting growing human service needs.

Last month, the Community Foundation hosted a fund holder event at Hawkeye Area Community Action Program (HACAP), where three nonprofit leaders shared how they are working to ensure food access in our community. We heard firsthand about the rising demand at food pantries across our region and how providers are striving to meet that need.

As I write this, we are expecting an upcoming gap in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits that will leave many of our neighbors without enough food to eat. With local food pantries already at or above capacity, this presents a significant challenge for our community.

This season is often called the season of giving and this year, that spirit is needed more than ever. If you have a fund at the Community Foundation, I encourage you to maximize your annual grant distributions. If you already support organizations you care about, consider giving a little more this year. And if you're looking for ideas, please visit our Nonprofit Giving Center and Calendar at gcrf.org or reach out to our team.

We are in this together. Thank you for your generosity, compassion, and continued love for this community.

Karla
Karla Twedt-Ball
President & CEO

THE ART OF CONNECTION

Cultural Nonprofits Bring Us Together

In a survey last year, community members identified Linn County's greatest strengths. Unsurprisingly, at the top of the list were disaster resilience and a thriving arts and culture scene. Linn County has a long history of supporting and valuing the nonprofits that connect us through art, history, and culture.

"Strong, vibrant communities need strong, vibrant arts organizations," said Jason Zbornik, Executive Director of CSPS in Cedar Rapids. "Honestly, nothing else brings people together from every corner of life the way nonprofit arts organizations do. At CSPS, we are proud to be a key player in our community's heartbeat."

Housed in a 135-year-old building in NewBo, CSPS is a living link to the area's Czech heritage. Its black box theater, performance hall, and three galleries now host music, theater, and visual art from around the world.

With the help of a two-year, \$36,000 Program Support Grant from the Community Foundation, CSPS will partner with local cultural organizations on a World Music Series that will present 12 performances that celebrate global cultures and sounds.

"This is the latest way we're committed to celebrating our incredibly varied humanity," Jason said. "People



Visitors to CSPS Hall take in the work of Cedar Rapids artist Dori Patrick earlier this year. Photo credit: Charles Black Photography.

Supporting these organizations by giving time or money makes our families better and our community better."

Sara and Jim Sauter
Fund Holders

don't just simply attend arts programming—they walk away transformed. And that shared, powerful experience of seeing the world through new eyes is exactly what strengthens the very fabric of our community."

Supporting the Arts that Sustain Us

Changes to federal funding this year have left many non-profit leaders uncertain about the future. While donors continue to step up to fill gaps at health and human services, arts and cultural organizations face the risk of losing vital support.

Fortunately, Linn County is a resilient community—and not only in the face of natural disasters.

"The Cedar Rapids community is lucky; we can enjoy activities that are right here where we live," said Sara and Jim Sauter. The Sauters support a range of nonprofits through the Community Foundation, including human service and arts and cultural organizations. "Supporting these organizations by giving time or money makes our families better and our community better."



The Community Foundation continues to find creative ways to lift up the organizations that make Linn County a vibrant place to live. As part of its 75th anniversary celebration last year, we launched Free Admission Day, inviting residents to explore local arts and cultural organizations at no cost. The event helped these organizations connect with even more of the community.

The response was overwhelmingly positive, so much so that in 2025 it was expanded to two days.

"Linn County benefits from having strong museums, theatres, and other arts and cultural nonprofits," said Joe Heitz, Vice President of Community Impact at the Community Foundation. "These organizations have helped shape our identity as a community, and it's clear there is appetite for engaging with their work. Investing in the arts now ensures that we will continue to have places where we can come together."



DOING WHAT THEY CAN

Hilery Livengood and Ben Fashimpaur

Hilery Livengood and Ben Fashimpaur have made giving back a way of life. What started as small steps has grown into a meaningful journey of generosity—proof that persistence and purpose can create lasting change.

They first met while attending Washington High School. Years later, they reconnected when they were both cast in a Theatre Cedar Rapids production of *The Sound of Music*. Hilery and Ben married in 2015 and since then, they have worked hard to grow their support for the arts, human services, and other local causes—something they feel is their duty.

“Having grown up here, we’ve benefitted from the people who put money toward our schools and all the different things we were involved in as kids,” Hilery said. “An earlier generation did that for us, so it’s our turn now.”

Both Hilery and Ben grew up seeing philanthropy in action and hearing about the importance of giving back. As a professional fundraiser, Hilery sees firsthand how

philanthropy builds community and changes lives. When her brother Matt passed away in 2012, she encouraged the family to honor his legacy with a donor-advised fund at the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation.

Support from family and friends has helped the fund grow, and the conversations about recommending grants from the fund have helped the family keep Matt’s memory alive. To date, the endowed fund has granted to ten local nonprofits and continues to grow.

The impact of that experience inspired Hilery and Ben to establish two additional charitable funds of their own as they were able. Through a designated fund, they’ve endowed their annual gift to United Way of East Central Iowa. A separate donor-advised fund allows them the flexibility to respond to community needs.

For both funds, the couple used the Community Foundation’s Prairie Fund option, which allows donors to build their charitable funds gradually through smaller

gifts over several years. Though they may not have had the means for making substantial gifts in any given year, they focused on what was meaningful to them.

“Of course, meaningful is different to every person, and it changes over your lifetime,” Hilery said. “You don’t have to start huge, but the important thing is to start,” Ben added.

Starting early has allowed the couple to approach philanthropy with long-term goals and plans. By prioritizing giving and making consistent tax-wise gifts, Hilery and Ben have made progress toward those goals.

“You don’t have to start huge, but the important thing is to start.”

Ben Fashimpaur

“We’re fortunate enough to be done putting money away for the kids’ college, so we’ve redirected some of those funds to our donor-advised fund,” Hilery and Ben said. They’ve also named the Community Foundation as beneficiaries of their retirement plan and used “bunching” to maximize their giving power. “Especially when we retire, our Community Foundation funds will help us continue to support local nonprofits.”

But Hilery and Ben aren’t just planning for their own future. As lifelong residents of Linn County, they’re familiar with the community’s resilience and generosity in the face of challenges. As committed philanthropists, they recognize the importance of bringing others along on the journey.

And like all good philanthropists, Hilery and Ben are hopeful—hopeful that they can inspire the next generation, that our community will continue to care for each other, and that local nonprofits will keep bringing people together.

“I also hope that we can be an example so others see that there are ways to start,” Ben said. “Over time, that start you make can become very effective. Just by consciously trying to maximize the value of what we do have, we can actually achieve a lot of good.”



**Matthew Carl Livengood,
1971 – 2012**

The Matthew Carl Livengood Memorial Fund was established in honor of Hilery’s brother and has helped the family keep his memory alive.



Free Screenings of *UnCharitable* Ahead of #GivingTuesday

On the eve of #GivingTuesday – a global movement that inspires generosity and giving – the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation and United Way of East Central Iowa will host three free screenings of the film *UnCharitable* at the downtown Cedar Rapids Public Library’s Whipple Auditorium.

Screenings will take place on Monday, December 1, 2025, at 11 a.m., 3 p.m., and 5:30 p.m. Admission is free and open to the public, and no registration is required.

UnCharitable is a powerful and thought-provoking documentary that examines the realities of philanthropy and challenges conventional thinking about giving. The film explores how freeing nonprofits from outdated constraints can empower them to create lasting change. Donors and community members will leave with fresh insight into how effective philanthropy can strengthen Linn County.

“The nonprofit sector is currently experiencing a lot of uncertainties,” said Karla Twedt-Ball, President & CEO at the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation. “We’re hopeful that sharing this film with the broader community will inspire #GivingTuesday or year-end giving without constraints to help nonprofits navigate this time. We want donors to understand the challenges nonprofits are facing and how they can partner with them through philanthropy.”

GIVINGTUESDAY



TRUSTING NONPROFITS TO LEAD THE WAY

Guest Column by Joe Heitz,
Vice President of Community Impact

A recent survey from Independent Sector revealed that 57% of Americans have “high trust” in nonprofits. That number might seem unimpressive at first, but compared to the federal government (18%) or corporations (21%), trust in nonprofits is remarkably high. As our communities face challenges, we trust nonprofits to see us through.

In recent years, more donors and funders are putting their full trust in nonprofits. Communities are relying more heavily on nonprofit organizations, and trust-based philanthropy is fueling positive outcomes.

What is trust-based philanthropy?

Trust-based philanthropy is just what it sounds like. Nonprofit organizations know our communities and their challenges better than anyone. They’re the best positioned to build the partnerships and construct the solutions that will allow those they serve to thrive. By trusting their expertise, experiences, and vision, funders and philanthropists can help bring about real change.

Without real trust, funders can actually impede a nonprofit’s ability to address community issues. Gifts that don’t account for administration, fundraising, or other ‘overhead’ don’t cover the true cost of programs.

Say, for example, a well-intentioned donor makes a gift to a food pantry, but only wants the funds to be spent on the actual food. To use the gift, the organization must pay staff to either distribute the food or oversee volunteers. They have

to store the food, which means rent, insurance, and utilities costs, and the growing gap in funding means they will also need to invest in fundraising. The gift, though generous, creates barriers to achieving the mission.

Trust-based philanthropy moves us away from this paradox. By removing constraints on funding and giving from a place of trust, we allow nonprofits to expand their capacity to serve our community.

What does trust-based philanthropy look like?

Trust-based philanthropy does not mean disengaged philanthropy. It doesn’t mean that we should stop asking questions or trying to understand community needs. Trust-based philanthropy merely requires a new kind of engagement from donors and funders. When we stop asking about overhead expenses and start asking about vision, we build mutual trust with our community’s nonprofits.

As the largest funder in Linn County, the Community Foundation strives to stay on the leading edge of philanthropic best practice while remaining good stewards of your gifts to the community. By offering unrestricted grants, learning from grantees, and finding new ways to use existing resources, we’re taking steps to move our partnerships with nonprofits from transactional to relational. When donors and funders strive to meet nonprofits where they are at, our gifts become real investments in the organization and the community.

Greater Connection Event Series Launches with Focus on Food Insecurity

On September 24, 2025, community members gathered at HACAP’s food reservoir for Greater Connection: Reducing Food Insecurity. We heard firsthand from nonprofits tackling hunger in Linn County and engaged in a meaningful discussion about how philanthropy can help meet growing community needs.

With demand for food services continuing to rise, philanthropic support for these organizations is more important than ever.

“We’re serving more people who never thought they’d need this kind of help; it’s people who never thought they’d need to walk through the door,” said Nicole McAlexander, Executive Director of the Southeast Linn Community Center in Lisbon. “We’re working to diversify our funding sources, but our largest source is still individual donors.”

This event marked the launch of Greater Connection events, a new series designed to connect donors and community members to key local issues through behind-the-scenes looks at nonprofit work. Each session will foster open



dialogue about the challenges and opportunities facing our community.

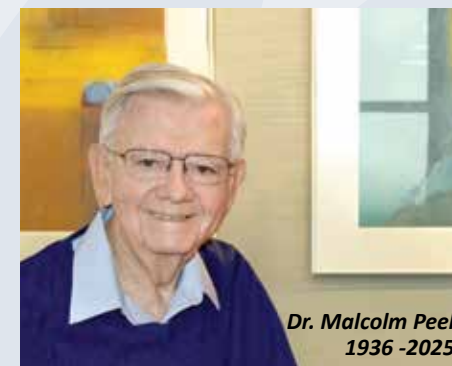
The next Greater Connection event will take place on December 9, 2025 from 4 – 5:30 p.m. at the Eastern Iowa Arts Academy, where we’ll explore how the organization is reimagining arts education. Learn more at gcrf.org.

Upcoming Events

- **UnCharitable Movie Screening** – Monday, December 1, 2025 at 11 a.m., 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., Cedar Rapids Public Library, Whipple Auditorium, co-hosted with United Way of East Central Iowa
- **#GivingTuesday** – Tuesday, December 2, 2025 – Visit the Nonprofit Giving Center and Calendar at gcrf.org to support a cause you care about.
- **Together on Purpose: Exploring the Spectrum of Nonprofit Collaboration** – Wednesday, December 10, 2025, 9 – 11 a.m., a virtual nonprofit learning event co-hosted with the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, Iowa Nonprofit Alliance, and the Larned A. Waterman University of Iowa Nonprofit Resource Center
- **Greater Connection: Reimagining Arts Education** – Tuesday, December 9, 2025, 4 – 5:30 p.m. at the Eastern Iowa Arts Academy

Learn more at gcrf.org.

A Heart for Community: Remembering Dr. Malcolm “Mack” Peel



On September 9, 2025, Dr. Malcolm Peel passed away in Oberlin, Ohio at age 89. Malcolm served as the Community Foundation’s first Executive Director, leading the organization from 1989 to 1994.

Before joining the Community Foundation, Malcolm—known to many as Mack – taught in Coe College’s philosophy and religion department and served as the National Endowment Director for the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

When he began his tenure with the Community Foundation, Malcolm inherited the goal of raising \$450,000 in three years. Within just six months, he surpassed that goal, securing more than \$1 million. Over the next several years, he formalized a grantmaking process, established a Nonprofit Resource Center, and guided the organization’s transition to a public

foundation – laying the groundwork for becoming a powerful asset for Linn County.

Last year, as the Community Foundation celebrated its 75th anniversary, Malcolm reflected on his time with the organization:

“Someone taught me once, that along our way in life, if we have an opportunity to speak a kind word, or extend a helping hand, or even contribute to a good cause, do these things now, because we shall not pass this way again,” he said. “And I’ve always remembered that, so I gave it my whole heart and soul.”



Attendees at a Stand Up for Peace event held earlier this year enjoy community activities and connection.

GROUP VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Building Relationships to Reduce Violence

In June 2025, the Cedar Rapids Police Department recorded only one shots fired incident. This was the lowest in any month since 2015 and a 67% decrease from June 2024. The CRPD partially credits the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) strategies for this good news, but also suggests other ways of measuring success.

GVI is an evidence-based approach that creates a network of care for those most impacted by violence. The strategy brings community members together with law enforcement and social service providers to focus an antiviolence message on highly active street groups. Initial implementation was funded by an anonymous gift to the Safe, Equitable, and Thriving (SET) Fund at the Community Foundation. The SET Fund was established and funded by the City of Cedar Rapids, Linn County, and the Cedar Rapids Community School District.

After leading the project for several years, the Community Foundation passed leadership of GVI to Foundation 2 in 2023. Foundation 2 now leads Stand Up for Peace, a collaboration that works with families and individuals to provide a path away from risky behaviors.

"The GVI Strategy is about building trust, opening lines of communication, and offering real opportunities for change," said Lisa Jordan, Group Violence Intervention Program Coordinator at Foundation 2. "We work directly with those most affected by gun violence, showing them that the community cares and support is available. We've already seen the impact—people are engaging, taking steps forward, and realizing they're not alone."

By starting conversations and prioritizing the shared goal of community safety, the collaborative has helped some community members see law enforcement agencies as allies. That relationship is the real marker of success, says the CRPD.

"I do not like to hang the success of anything on statistics," said Captain Charlie Fields, Community Services Division Commander. "The benchmark to measure any of this by is how the community feels. Do they feel safer? Personally, I think the answer to that is yes. Seeing the way officers talk with community members says a lot about the trust that's been built over the years."

Of course, violence prevention requires ongoing work. The network has continued to grow, connecting youth to a wide range of programs and services. The collaborative is confident they will continue to see success as long as the community supports the work.

"GVI is a three-legged approach," said Captain Fields. "Besides law enforcement and Foundation 2's outreach, we also need strong community voices and role models to be a part of the program. It takes a village to raise a child, and we need more villagers."

For more information on the GVI collaborative and how you can get involved, visit Foundation2.org/gvi.



Students at Springville Community Schools are learning with new classroom supplies funded through DonorsChoose and a matching contribution from the Community Foundation.

Gifts to Local Classrooms Build Inclusive Learning Environments

If there is one thing Jonilynn Thompson knows, it's that every kid learns in their own way. For the last 12 years, Ms. Thompson has taught preschool in the Springville Community School District. As many teachers do, she spent time this summer ensuring her classroom was set up to give all students the best learning experience possible.

"I follow a few teachers on social media to get new ideas for the classroom," Joni said. "This summer I found some new ways to introduce sensory learning and create opportunities for exploration."

Through another teacher, Joni learned about DonorsChoose.org. She could list her project on the site, and local donors could make gifts to cover the costs. Each August, the Community Foundation's Fund for Educational

Excellence matches gifts to Linn County public school classroom projects made through the platform, providing an additional \$30,000 for projects like Joni's.

With the funding, Joni was able to purchase items like LCD writing tablets, Play-Doh accessories, scented markers, and audiobook equipment. The supplies will allow the kids to see, hear, touch, and even smell as they learn letters and numbers.

"Some of the new items will help support different ways of learning in our writing center," Joni said. "Instead of just seeing the letters, now our kids can make them with Play-Doh, trace them in shaving cream, or practice writing on the LCD's. We even got a button that lets us record letter sounds, and the kids love pushing that to practice letters."

DonorsChoose Match

2025

107 projects funded
27 schools served
96 teachers supported

Since 2015

\$285,000 in matching grants
\$570,000 in total support for Linn County classrooms
1,128 classroom projects fully funded



Nonprofit Toastmasters



Thrive Cohort



Learning Cohort for Small and Grassroots Nonprofits



Independent Sector Listening Session



Nonprofit Know-How

THE POWER OF LEARNING

Stronger Nonprofits, Stronger Linn County

The Community Foundation is here to strengthen Linn County, and we're known for doing that by partnering with donors and awarding grants to nonprofits. But engaged donors and strong organizations are only part of the equation; our community truly thrives when those organizations learn together and work collaboratively. Through a variety of events, we provide learning opportunities that lead to a stronger and more connected nonprofit sector.

The Nonprofit Network

Since 2005, the Nonprofit Network has connected nonprofit professionals and volunteers to resources that help them better serve Linn County. The Network's Peer Groups bring together people working in similar roles to discuss challenges and best practices. Nonprofit Know-How events provide fast, free and focused training on everything from strategic planning to artificial intelligence.

"Nonprofits are facing a lot of challenges right now," said Carrie Walker, Vice President of Learning, "including increased demand for services, budget uncertainties, and workforce shortages. It's especially important to come together now and leverage the resources we have to serve our community as best we can."

One way to leverage those resources is through partnerships. This fall, the Nonprofit Network has teamed up with United Way of East Central Iowa and Kirkwood Community College to lead a nonprofit management class. The training is helping nonprofit managers develop the skills, strategies and connections needed to thrive in the sector.

To provide more in-depth and focused learning and connections, the Nonprofit Network also offers several Learning Cohorts. In a small group setting, nonprofit professionals explore best practices, learn

from experts, and build connections. Recent cohorts include the Learning Cohort for Small & Grassroots Nonprofits and Thrive Cohort, which serves Black, Brown, and Bi-racial nonprofit leaders.

Taking Advantage of New Opportunities

Connecting nonprofits to useful resources often means taking advantage of opportunities as they arise. This fall, the Nonprofit Network partnered with Junior Achievement of Eastern Iowa to connect nonprofit professionals to Toastmasters International. The group will meet regularly to build skills in public speaking and leadership.

In October, we worked with the Iowa Nonprofit Alliance and the Iowa Council of Foundations to host a listening session with Independent Sector. The organization advocates for the nonprofit sector on a national level. Roughly 50 local nonprofit representatives gathered to share stories, celebrations, and concerns, informing the larger narrative about how nonprofits support communities.

Reasons to Give Before Year-End

Now is the ideal time to give—community needs are rising, and year-end gifts can also provide you with meaningful tax benefits.

Endow Iowa Changes Ahead



As of early November, less than \$2 million remains of the \$6 million available for the 2025 Endow Iowa tax credit program. Beginning on January 1, 2026, the total annual tax credit allocation will decrease to \$3.5 million and the maximum tax credit per taxpayer will be reduced from \$100,000 to \$50,000. Credits can still be carried forward for up to five years. If you're considering a gift to an endowed fund, act now to benefit from the current program.

Smart Giving: Donor-Advised Funds and "Bunching"



Upcoming tax law changes make "bunching" a smart giving strategy—combining a few years of charitable contributions into one year to exceed the standard deduction and increase tax savings. Starting in 2026, gifts below 0.5% of adjusted gross income will no longer qualify for a charitable deduction. By bunching donations and contributing to a Donor-Advised Fund at the Community Foundation, you can secure maximum tax benefits now and support your favorite causes over time.

'Tis the Season for Stock Gifts



Donating stock can be a smart and simple way to maximize tax benefits, avoid capital gains on the appreciated value, and support your favorite causes.

Please notify our office when you are making a gift of stock.



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319.366.2862 | gcrf.org

Where philanthropy multiplies for the
GREATER GOOD of Linn County.

Everything you know about change...
is about to change.

SCREENINGS IN CEDAR RAPIDS
DECEMBER 1, 2025
11 A.M.
3 P.M.
5:30 P.M.

Cedar Rapids Public Library
Whipple Auditorium

UnCharitable

GREATER CEDAR RAPIDS
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

UNITED WAY
East Central
Iowa

UnCharitableMovie.com

upstreampictures ABRAMORAMA

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

