

# COMMUNITY

News for the Greater Good of Linn County



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to Play and Connect



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# OUR COMMUNITY'S SUPERPOWER:

## A Message from our President & CEO



I'm sure it is no secret that I love to talk and think about the power of community. It's idealistic, yes, but also deeply practical. This newsletter showcases both the idealism and the results of what I like to think is our community's superpower.

In our last newsletter of 2025, I wrote about funding challenges in the nonprofit sector. As a community, you really stepped up in response. December was a flurry of year-end giving, and 2025 was one of our top years for contributions. I shouldn't be surprised, given this community's history of generosity, but I'm consistently awed by our ability to care for one another.

In this newsletter, we touch on just a few of the ways that Linn County is resilient, collaborative, and innovative. We're excited to announce and support a federal grant that is multiplying local dollars to address lead levels in aging homes. We're also launching a new revolving loan fund to help local nonprofits bridge funding gaps.

Last year, we introduced the Greater Connection event series to help build community among our donors. These events lean into our connective role of bringing nonprofit leaders and donors together, and it was an honor to help showcase the Eastern Iowa Arts Academy's innovative new space in December. Stay tuned for details on future events and other ways we're working to build greater connections.

And last, but certainly not least, we've got a few new people on our team to help make all our work possible. The new year brings new faces to our Board of Directors, and we also have a few staff updates to share.

The year ahead will likely bring additional challenges, but I'm heartened, as usual, by the power of our community. Thank you for your continued generosity and compassion.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karla".

**Karla Twedt-Ball**  
President & CEO



# PLAY, PARKS, AND POSSIBILITY:

## Philanthropy at Work in Recreation

The nonprofit sector is often associated with the social safety net it provides when people and communities face challenges. But the sector connects us to more than basic needs and arts and culture. Often overlooked is the vital role nonprofits play in connecting us to outdoor recreation opportunities.

From sports leagues and youth camps to conservation efforts and environmental education, nonprofits build, enhance, and maintain much of our local recreation infrastructure. Even government projects like parks and trails often receive significant philanthropic support.

"Recreation is more than leisure—it improves physical and mental health, brings us together, and connects us to the place we call home," said Rochelle Naylor, Senior Program Officer at the Community Foundation. "In Linn County, we're fortunate to have strong nonprofits working to provide equitable access to a wide range of recreational opportunities."

In 2025, the Community Foundation awarded more than \$194,000 to 23 nonprofits dedicated to providing recreational spaces and experiences. Here are a few of those grants making a difference across our communities:



## Chain Reaction Bike Hub

Chain Reaction Bike Hub was started in 2023 to make it easier for people to access and maintain bicycles. Through a variety of programs, the volunteer-run organization provides bicycles to people in need, children, and volunteers. The Bike Hub also offers workshops and refurbishes or recycles old bikes.

“Our goal is to empower people with the tools, knowledge, and support they need to feel confident on their bikes,” said Evan Schmidtke, Executive Director. “We’re continually looking for ways to show up for our community and help more people experience the benefits and the joy bikes can bring.”

The Bike Hub grew from Linn County Public Health’s focus on violence prevention and equitable access to physical activity. The idea to use bikes to engage youth, advance transportation equity, and improve health eventually led to the nonprofit’s founding. Today, Chain Reaction operates independently, partnering with other organizations and agencies to build healthier communities and promote environmental stewardship.

## Friends of Noelridge Greenhouse and Botanical Garden

Since 1971, the greenhouse at Noelridge Park has grown flowers and other plants for use in public spaces throughout Cedar Rapids. In 2008, the Friends of Noelridge Park Greenhouse and Botanical Garden formed to support this work and provide community engagement opportunities. Today, the volunteer-run organization raises up to 60,000 plants each year and offers guided tours.

“Our organization provides 5,000 volunteer hours per year to create opportunities for people of all ages to learn about plants, pollinators, and the importance of a balanced ecosystem,” said Mary Moore, Board President. “We’re looking forward to adding the water-themed adventure space, which will add to our recreational and educational space.”

With help from a Program Support Grant, Friends of Noelridge is expanding the park’s Children’s Garden in 2026. When the project is complete, the area will feature a 1,200-foot interactive water wall, flower lake, sandbox, aquatic plant display, and sculptures with educational signage.

# Philanthropy at Work in Recreation

(cont. from page 3)



## Prospect Meadows

Since opening in the spring of 2019, Prospect Meadows has attracted tens of thousands of visitors to Linn County. In addition to the 1,000+ traveling teams that compete in tournaments, the facility also hosts nearly 800 local youth games and practices each year. Prospect Meadows is also home to the Miracle League of Linn County, which brings the baseball experience to kids of all abilities.

"Our slogan is 'where all kids play,' and we take that very seriously," said Jack Roeder, President and CEO. "Over 150 youth participate in the Miracle League each year, and the joy it brings to players and families is truly heartwarming."

Donors and foundations played a major role in the construction of Prospect Meadows, and the organization continues to pay that generosity forward. Through the League of Dreams, which provides free opportunities to play for underserved youth, as well as fundraising and advocacy partnerships with local nonprofits, Prospect Meadows supports Linn County's young people in a variety of ways.



## City of Alburnett

Though Alburnett has been around for over 150 years, one thing has always been missing: a park of its own. This summer that will change as the community comes together to bring the first city-owned park to this growing town.

"This project creates the first inclusive, public green space in Alburnett where residents of all ages and abilities can engage in outdoor activities," said Vikki Kula, City Clerk. "It will enhance the quality of life in our community by serving as a central gathering space for events and outdoor recreation."

The idea for the park grew out of community input, and the project is backed by residents, City Council, and the Alburnett School District. Construction is being made possible through city funding, grants, volunteerism, and in-kind gifts. The park will feature play equipment, a walking loop, basketball and pickleball courts, a pavilion with attached restrooms, and walking connections to other local amenities.



*Leaders behind a new community resource: Karen Kurt and Robyn Jacobson of ECICOG, and Joe Heitz and Paula Lange of the Community Foundation, gather to celebrate the launch of the new Revolving Loan Fund – a partnership that will provide low-interest loans to help Linn County nonprofits strengthen and sustain their work.*

# REVOLVING LOAN FUND: A New Support for Linn County Nonprofits

Early this year, the Community Foundation launched a Revolving Loan Fund for local nonprofit organizations. The fund will be administered by the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) and will provide low-interest loans of \$2,500- \$25,000 to nonprofits headquartered and operating in Linn County.

“At the Community Foundation, we strive to listen to the needs of the organizations serving our community,” said Joe Heitz, Vice President of Community Impact. “We’ve heard from many small- and mid-sized nonprofits that access to credit is an ongoing challenge.”

The Revolving Loan Fund is a new resource that can help those organizations grow services, maintain operations, and even access additional grants. Because some federal grants are paid as reimbursements, nonprofits may have upfront costs. Access to a short-term loan would reduce the initial burden as organizations await such grant funding.

Funding for the program comes from the Community Foundation’s Community Investment Fund, which supports programs or projects that catalyze community involvement on issues of broad importance. Using these funds allows the Community Foundation to launch the program without impacting its existing competitive grant programs. As a revolving fund, this investment in the community will be able to serve a growing list of nonprofits over time.

## Building on Strong Partnerships

Community Foundation staff looked at existing programs in other states and drew on past experiences to bring the Revolving Loan Fund to life.

In 2015, the Community Foundation worked with donors, businesses, and government groups to launch MICRO. This award-winning program provides low-interest loans and other resources to entrepreneurs in Cedar Rapids. MICRO, also administered by ECICOG, has helped dozens of small businesses. The existing partnership helped make the Revolving Loan Fund a possibility at a time when many nonprofits are looking for new funding solutions.

“We are excited to be able to partner with the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation on this project,” said Karen Kurt, Executive Director of ECICOG. “Many nonprofit funding sources have been disrupted over the last year, and this loan program will allow our nonprofits to continue to provide critical community services as well as look forward to future needs.”

Loan applications are available now at [ecicog.org](http://ecicog.org).



Students in a rock band at the Eastern Iowa Arts Academy rehearse during the Community Foundation's Greater Connection event, giving donors a behind-the-scenes look at the creativity and learning that takes place at the academy.



Executive Director Heather Dewey Wagner and Board President Isaiah Pirtle

## Greater Connection Event Showcases Arts Education

On December 9, community members gathered at the Eastern Iowa Arts Academy for Greater Connection: Reimagining Arts Education. This new series of events, launched in 2025, offers a chance for philanthropists to hear from local nonprofits and leaders. Events are designed to bring donors closer to the community's needs and opportunities.

"Much of our arts and cultural experiences come to us through nonprofits," President & CEO Karla Twedt-Ball said at the event. "But we cannot take those organizations for granted. Public resources are under threat, private resources are strained, and nonprofits are having to adapt to new realities."

The Eastern Iowa Arts Academy recently purchased and renovated the former Arthur Elementary School. The building

now houses the Academy's wide range of programming. At the December event, Community Foundation donors got a behind-the-scenes look at this historic, innovative, and evolving space.

"Giving tours of Arthur School and walking people through our classrooms, studios, and future plans allowed me to show rather than just tell what we do and why it matters," said Heather Dewey Wagner, Executive Director. "The conversations, the questions, and the genuine curiosity from donors made the experience feel incredibly special. It was energizing to hear their perspectives and to feel their excitement as they saw our creative work up close."

For more information about Greater Connection and other learning events at the Community Foundation, visit [gcrf.org](https://gcrf.org).





## SAFER HOMES AHEAD: \$3 Million Secured for Lead Hazard Removal

Late last year, the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) brought regional groups together to apply for a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The joint effort has resulted in nearly \$3 million to help low- and middle-income homes address hazardous lead levels.

Until they were banned in the 1970's and 80's, lead-based paint and plumbing supplies were widely used in homes. Even at low levels, exposure to lead can impair mental and physical development. More than half of Linn County homes were built prior to 1978, making them more likely to have lead paint or dust.

"Iowa has some of the nation's oldest housing stock, and more than 100,000 homes in our region were built prior to 1978," said Paula Mitchell, Housing Director at ECICOG. "Iowa's incidence of elevated blood lead levels in children under 6 exceeds the national average. Reducing lead hazards in housing will help to address a major factor contributing to childhood lead poisoning."

Addressing the issue is expensive, averaging more than \$21,000 per home. Additionally, Linn County's older homes are disproportionately located in low-income neighborhoods. With no local assistance programs, addressing lead levels has remained out of reach for many.

The HUD grant program provides funding for lead remediation programs that serve people earning less than 80% of the area median income (about \$101,000 for a family of four in Linn

County). Communities are required to provide 10% of the project's budget, with HUD providing the rest. The Community Foundation has committed \$50,000 from its Community Investment Fund. ECICOG, the City of Cedar Rapids, the Housing Trust Fund for Linn County, the East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund, and the Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County are providing another \$246,498. The program will provide more than \$2.9 million to address lead hazards in 90 Eastern Iowa homes. About 30 of those homes will be in Linn County.

"The Community Foundation is excited to support this effort with a grant from the Community Investment Fund, which seeks to leverage existing funding and catalyze community action," said Joe Heitz, Vice President of Community Impact. "Lead exposure is a real concern for those living in Linn County's older homes, and this is a great opportunity to provide those families with solutions."

The program will begin accepting applications this spring, and funding will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Details on eligibility and funding limits are available at [ecicog.org](http://ecicog.org).

"We're excited to implement this program, which will help approximately 90 families with young children to make their homes safer," Paula said. "We also appreciate our regional partners who helped us to make this happen."



# MEETING THE MOMENT:

## How the Greater Good Fund Strengthens Linn County

One of the Community Foundation’s greatest strengths lies in its ability to respond to community needs and opportunities as they change. This work is made possible by the Greater Good Fund, which helps nonprofits meet our community’s evolving and unanticipated needs – today and for generations to come.

At its heart, the Greater Good Fund is an unrestricted fund that empowers the Community Foundation to strengthen Linn County with flexibility and foresight. Over our history, these funds have been used for grantmaking, disaster response, community initiatives, and the Community Foundation’s work to support nonprofit excellence and sustainability.

Donors who give to the Greater Good Fund recognize the power of collective action and trust the Community

Foundation to be a good steward of those community assets. They also recognize that the future holds challenges and opportunities that we cannot predict.

### Grantmaking for the Greater Good

The flexibility of the Greater Good Fund made it an enormous asset during the 2008 flood, the 2020 derecho, and the COVID-19 pandemic. But even when there are no disasters, the Greater Good Fund provides more than \$1.5 million each year for local nonprofits for operations, innovation, sustainability, and other community priorities.

“Nonprofits in Linn County are working every day to improve our community,” said Joe Heitz, Vice President



#### You give.

Make a gift to the Greater Good Fund or establish your own named Greater Good Fund.



#### Your impact grows.

Your contribution is invested in a permanent endowment alongside other generous gifts, ensuring long-term growth and sustainability.



#### We act.

Diverse volunteer committee members review grant proposals and recommend grants to nonprofit organizations.



#### You make a difference.

Your gift provides immediate support for responsive grantmaking and helps address unexpected or long-term community needs.



of Community Impact. “Grant programs supported by the Greater Good Fund invest in sustainability and innovation at these vital organizations.”

## Working Together for the Greater Good

The Greater Good Fund thrives on contributions of all sizes and allows donors to create a legacy of giving that supports the community beyond their lifetime.



“I have been blessed by this community that I have worked and raised my family in. I want it to continue be a vibrant place into the future.”

– **Chris Casey, Fund Holder**



We have given through the Community Foundation for many years, and we are delighted to help meet the needs of the community. Unrestricted giving is an excellent way to support our community.”

– **Duffy and Belva Schamberger, Fund Holders**



“Unrestricted grants give unlimited flexibility for the Community Foundation to provide funding and support as needs arise in the community in the future that cannot be predicted at this time.”

– **Gordon and Jann Baustian, Fund Holders**

# Endowment Challenge Grants Provide Stability for Nonprofits

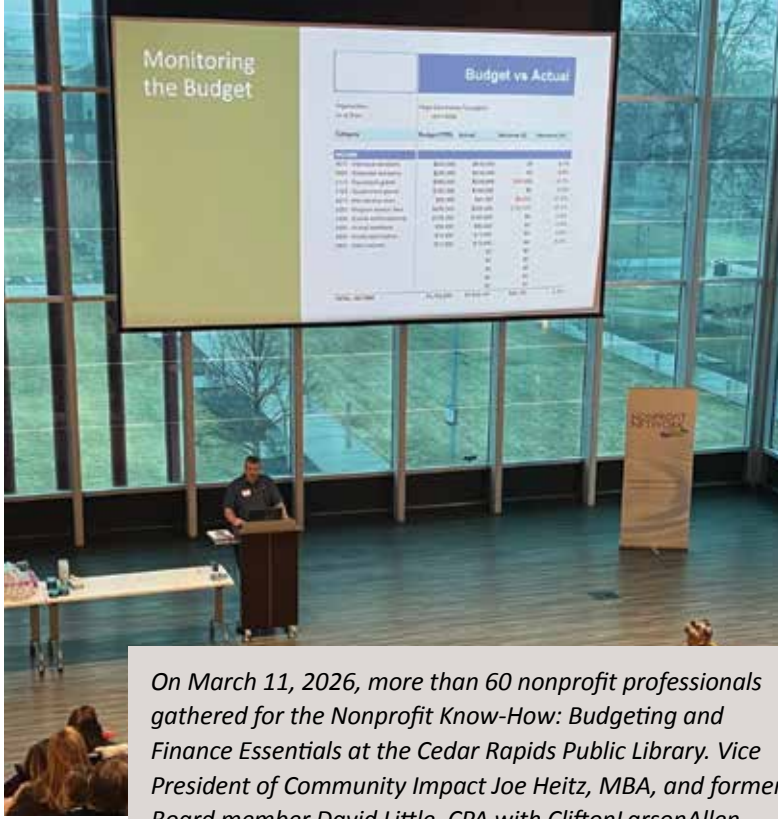
Last fall, the Community Foundation awarded Endowment Challenge Grants to three local nonprofits. Each grant provides \$1 for every \$3 the nonprofit raises, up to \$25,000 – resulting in a \$100,000 endowed fund. Endowed funds grow over time and make annual distributions, providing nonprofits with a permanent source of income. Gifts to Endowment Challenge Funds can be made directly to the organizations or through the Community Foundation’s Nonprofit Giving Center at [gcrf.org](http://gcrf.org).

## 2025 Endowment Challenge Grant Recipients:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cedar Rapids & East Central Iowa  
Hawkeye Area Council, Scouting America  
YPN

## Other Active Endowment Challenge Funds:

Cedar Rapids Freedom Festival  
Indian Creek Nature Center  
NewBo City Market  
Orchestra Iowa



*On March 11, 2026, more than 60 nonprofit professionals gathered for the Nonprofit Know-How: Budgeting and Finance Essentials at the Cedar Rapids Public Library. Vice President of Community Impact Joe Heitz, MBA, and former Board member David Little, CPA with CliftonLarsonAllen shared practical budgeting tools, highlighted common financial pitfalls, explained how to read nonprofit financial statements, and discussed strategies for communicating financial needs to boards, funders, and staff.*

# Learning Through Nonprofit Know-How Events

Over 100 nonprofit professionals have gathered for three Nonprofit Know-How events since December 2025. These fast, free and focused learning opportunities cover timely topics for nonprofit staff and leaders.

In December, participants explored the value and impact of collaborations. In January, they learned about how the Community Foundation can support their organizations. Earlier this month, nonprofit professionals came together again to dive into budgeting and finance essentials. Each session is designed to provide meaningful connections, practical resources, and access to subject matter experts.

## 2026 Board Officers



Chair:  
**Nancy Hill**  
Mercy Medical Center



Chair-Elect:  
**Matthew Van Maanen**  
Aegon/Transamerica



Treasurer:  
**Janice Kerkove**  
Bradley & Riley PC



Secretary:  
**Cathy Terukina**  
Community Volunteer



Past Chair:  
**Michelle Niermann**  
Community Volunteer

## Welcome, New Board Members!



**Ben Isaacson**  
Growthland



**Amanda Lane**  
TDT CPAs and Advisors



**Alejandro Pino**  
YPN



**Kristen Wilcox**  
Attorney



## UnCharitable Sparks Community Conversation

On December 1, the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation's Nonprofit Network and the United Way of East Central Iowa hosted three free screenings of *UnCharitable* at an early #GivingTuesday event. The documentary poses tough questions about philanthropy and how we support nonprofit organizations.

"For our nonprofits to fulfill their missions and to change the world, we need to focus on their results, and stop looking so heavily at overhead," said Brad Hart, local attorney and former mayor of Cedar Rapids. "We can and should invest more in nonprofits, including funding their ability to attract and retain top talent, to help them better serve our communities. It's time to shift our funding toward real, lasting change."

The film has been well received by nonprofits, community leaders, and donors alike. This was the third local screening and is part of the Community Foundation's effort to challenge common assumptions about the nonprofit sector and encourage unrestricted support for organizations serving Linn County.

"*UnCharitable* challenges what we think we know about nonprofits and how we support their work," said Carrie Walker, Vice President of Learning. "It also lays out a new way of giving that empowers nonprofits to achieve their missions."

## WELCOME TO THE TEAM



**Cameron Jacobs**

Accounting Clerk



**Melissa Pence, CFRE, MSL**

Director of Development



**Blenda Peterson**

Development Services Associate



**Rachel Schneider**

Donor Relations Associate



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319.366.2862 | [gcrf.org](http://gcrf.org)

Where philanthropy multiplies for the  
**GREATER GOOD** of Linn County.



## Make Plans. Make an Impact.

Visit the Nonprofit Calendar at [\*\*gcrf.org\*\*](http://gcrf.org).

Looking for something fun to do while making a difference? Check out the Nonprofit Calendar at [gcrf.org](http://gcrf.org) to discover upcoming events, fundraisers, and community gatherings hosted by nonprofits across Linn County.

From family-friendly activities to meaningful events, there's always an opportunity to show up, get involved, and support the organizations that strengthen our community.

### Upcoming Events

- **Save the Date! William Quarton Heritage Society Luncheon**  
Tuesday, June 9, 2026, 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m., at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library
- **Next Grant Deadline**  
Thursday, July 2, 2026 by 4:30 p.m. CST. Learn more at [\*\*gcrf.org\*\*](http://gcrf.org).

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

