



On June 25, Keith County Foundation Fund announced to the community that it had received a \$7 million anonymous, unrestricted gift, increasing its grantmaking capacity from \$35,000 annually to over \$400,000. Members of the Keith County Foundation Fund Advisory Committee asked community members in attendance to provide input on grantmaking opportunities that could significantly improve quality of life and economic development in the area.

NCF25: Turn It Up. DREAM!

Nebraska Community Foundation's 25th anniversary year has been full of milestones and monumental moments. Momentum is building in over 250 Nebraska hometowns as nearly 1,500 volunteers are leading a statewide grassroots movement to build a brighter future.

Growing endowments, especially those that are unrestricted, has been a cornerstone of the NCF approach since we got our start in 1994. Two and a half decades later, the NCF network crossed a major landmark—\$100 million in endowed assets. That's capital that will stay in our communities forever.

Forty-three Greater Nebraska communities in the NCF network now have at least \$10,000 in annual

unrestricted endowment payout. Many are working to meet homegrown challenge grants. Belief in the future of Greater Nebraska and the abundance that can be found here is spreading like a beneficial virus to every corner of the state.

In June, one of the biggest community investments in NCF's history was announced in Keith County—a \$7 million anonymous gift to the Keith County Foundation Fund unrestricted endowment. KCF's granting capacity will increase tenfold, from \$35,000 annually to over \$400,000 to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in this community. It's a huge responsibility and NCF is working closely with local volunteers to make the most of this transformative opportunity.

Longtime members of the Nebraska Community Foundation network have undoubtedly noticed, as this movement grows, so does demand for our services and ultimately, the NCF team must grow too. New positions have been created to respond to the evolving needs of our communities and importantly, many of these employees, like our volunteers, are making their homes in Greater Nebraska.

No one can predict what the next 25 years will look like, but together, we can ensure Greater Nebraska is the kind of place that is poised to respond to changing times, willing to embrace new opportunities, utilizing its assets to the fullest, and has the relationships already in place to dream bigger than ever before. ■

INSIDE NCF

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New York Times columnist David Brooks meets with Nebraska City weavers.

Weaving Our Way to a Greater Nebraska



Jeff Yost, NCF
President and CEO

“Everybody says rural America is collapsing,” wrote New York Times journalist David Brooks in his March 21 column, “But I keep going to places with more moral coherence and social commitment than we have in booming urban areas. These visits prompt the same question: How can we spread the civic mind-set they have in abundance?”

Brooks published this observation just a few days after a trip across Greater Nebraska, touring Nebraska City, Grand Island, McCook and North Platte and meeting passionate community builders from hometowns across the NCF network like Albion, Bertrand, Byron, Columbus, David City, Grant, Imperial, Ogallala, Ord, Paxton, Red Cloud, and Taylor.

The social phenomenon Brooks and his team have coined “weaving” has long been the way of life in rural Nebraska. Throughout this newsletter you will see countless examples of weavers at work, whether it’s empowering and educating local youth, coming together to give the community center a facelift, making a planned gift to benefit your hometown, or rebuilding after a catastrophic flood.

Having David Brooks and the Weave team here was a meaningful reminder of why we are so lucky to call this place home. Nebraska and Nebraskans are truly extraordinary. We step up when a neighbor is in need. We give freely and unconditionally of our time, talent and treasure. We are willing to roll up our sleeves, both metaphorically and literally. It is thanks to ambitious and resourceful weavers that Nebraska is a place where our hometowns are achieving their dreams. ■

Welcome Kyle Bucknell!



Kyle Bucknell joined the NCF staff as Senior Accountant in Finance in April 2019. His responsibilities include handling general accounting for investments, fees, fund statements, budget analysis

and financial reports. Kyle helps Fund Advisory Committee members with questions about their account balances, endowment payouts, and financial reports. Originally from Lincoln, Kyle and his wife, Jennifer, have four daughters. He says the best thing about working at NCF is the satisfaction he receives from helping people from across Nebraska achieve great things for their communities. ■



NCF Goes “All In!” NCF board, staff and volunteers recently traveled to Victoria, British Columbia for Community Foundations of Canada’s Annual Conference where participants were challenged to rise to the event’s theme, “All In.” Our neighbors to the north have long served as leaders in both research and programs that explore what it means to “belong” in a community. Members of the NCF network participated in many sessions over the three-day event focused on diversity, inclusion, belonging, and the creative ways philanthropists and community foundations are using their power, resources and networks to accelerate positive change in their communities. ■

Exploring Greater Nebraska

NCF board meetings give members and staff yet another good excuse to visit and learn about our Greater Nebraska communities. Our June meeting took us to David City, Schuyler, St. Edward, Genoa and Columbus where we witnessed the inspiring work of the Butler County Area Foundation Fund, toured Cargill Meat Solutions, and heard how communities across the state came together to support the areas of Nebraska most affected by the March 2019 floods. Whether it’s using technology to keep students connected to their classmates across submerged roads, or providing support to first generation Americans, each tour stop demonstrated the resourceful nature and innovative spirit that defines our Nebraska hometowns. ■



#WeavethePeople In May, 275 community “weavers” from across the country (among them 14 Nebraskans shown here) gathered at Union Market in Washington, D.C. to share their own personal stories, listen to the experiences of others, combat social isolation, and unite their communities and organizations in a growing movement

for the common good. Representatives from Columbus, Grand Island, McCook, Nebraska City, Ogallala, Paxton, Taylor, and Lincoln were personally invited by the Weave team to talk about the work of their Nebraska Community Foundation community-based affiliated funds and how the NCF network is weaving its way to a Greater Nebraska. ■

Introducing the NCF Peer Learning Library

We are excited and proud to share the newest addition to our website: the NCF Peer Learning Library!

Our Peer Learning Library contains dozens of real-life examples and resources from communities across the NCF network. Explore these pages and learn how to maximize your FAC’s leadership, sharpen your fundraising and marketing skills, and make grants that make a real difference. Visit www.nebcommfound.org/resources/peer-learning-library and explore all five sections of the NCF Peer Learning Library:

FUNDRAISING



Materials developed by and for funds to help with campaign planning, donor visits and follow-up.

FAC LEADERSHIP



Nuts and bolts tools to help your fund with committee member recruitment and orientation.

IMPACT/GRANTMAKING



Grant guidelines, forms, applications, and more.

MARKETING & PROMOTION



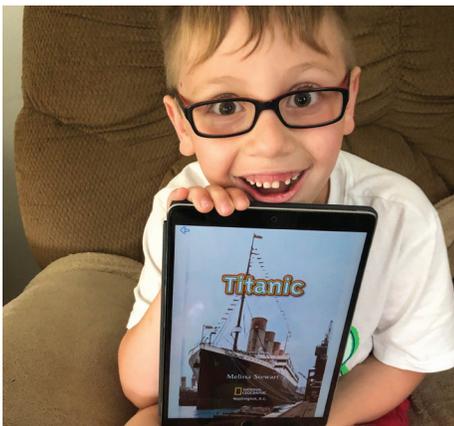
Sample logos, annual reports, flyers, newsletters, advertisements, press releases and more.

NCF CLASSROOM



Timely blog posts penned by NCF mentors, staff and other collaborators on a variety of topics.

AFFILIATED FUND UPDATES



Max Alvarado of Norfolk used his Youth Philanthropy Contest award to share his love for reading with his schoolmates.

Norfolk's Youth Philanthropy Contest brings out the best in youngsters and their adult mentors. First-grader Max Alvarado's project "Bring Home Books" gives his fellow students at Westside Elementary access to thousands of books through the ReadingIQ online library database. Students received their passcodes at a school assembly which featured state poet Matt Mason. Max and his mom, Melissa, hope the project will help kids who may face difficulties with reading proficiency. ■

Nebraska City Community Foundation Fund is supporting the pollinator garden near the Life Skills House at Nebraska City Middle School campus. The project launched this past spring will provide a habitat for pollinating insects, whose populations have declined in recent years. Students researched and planned the garden before planting. Included in the design is a bench and fencing to create an outdoor reading space. We'll be back to visit and to see the results of this great project made possible with the help of these young gardeners. ■



Isabelle Johnson, left, and Izzy Izer help plant a garden in Nebraska City filled with plants that attract pollinating insects.



PHOTO: FRIEND SENTINEL

Kids in Dorchester helped with the groundbreaking of a new splash pad they hope to enjoy later this summer.

Dorchester Community Foundation Fund has raised more than \$185,000 toward its splash pad project to be installed this summer in the city park. When completed, it will include more than 18 different features for kids to enjoy. Splash pads are becoming popular in hometowns across the state because they are a low-cost, safe alternative to swimming pools. **Bennet Area Community Foundation Fund** celebrated completion of its splash pad project in May. In addition to building its unrestricted endowment, this fast-growing community east of Lincoln has been working on this and additional village park improvements since 2016. ■



Volunteers work together over a weekend to assemble a gazebo kit shipped to Callaway from an Amish community in Pennsylvania.

Callaway Community Fund helped with funding for a gazebo built on vacant land adjacent to the community center. After removing tons of decorative rock that was used elsewhere, volunteers assembled the structure and installed lighting as the first phase in creating a memorial garden. The gazebo, all the way from a Pennsylvania Amish community, is the centerpiece of a future perennial garden with benches and a memorial wall, designed to provide a quiet space for visitors, especially when an event is happening at the center. The Fund also provided funds for the installation of "Welcome to Callaway" banners earlier this year. ■

Calamus Area Community Fund accepted a check for \$185 from Burwell Elementary third-graders. The students put their energy to work by setting up two competing baking companies, complete with marketing strategies and pricing. After sales were tallied, only \$4.50 separated the two teams. As a class, the students chose to give the profits to the Fund, earmarked for the city park restroom improvements. A point of pride for the Fund is its broad community support. Its recent \$200,000 challenge grant campaign involved 480 donors and an average gift of \$445. The campaign was successful, earning another \$100,000 in challenge grant funds. ■



Creative appetites are satisfied through the summer arts program held weekly at The Old Feed Store Art Center in Bassett.

Rock County Community Fund is partnering with The Old Feed Store Art Center in Bassett to offer weekly art classes all summer long to kids in grades K-12. The program receives matching support from an anonymous NCF donor-advised fund.

Thanks to the same youth engagement grant, the public library is hosting its summer reading program as it has in the past but will also feature events by the Edgerton Explorit Center and activities in computer coding and robotics. The programs are offered free of charge. ■

Brown County Community Foundation Fund was the chosen recipient of a grant from the Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year, Ben Arens. Ben donated his \$1,000 award to BCCFF with gratitude for the support the Fund provides sports activities in his hometown of Ainsworth. Ben has served on the BCAFF youth grantmaking committee and says the best thing about his hometown is how close people are and how everyone looks out for one another. Ben is headed for UNK as a pre-med student this fall. ■



Makenna Schroeder of Syracuse applies a coat of paint to her project during the "Funky Furniture" session at Syracuse's Summer Blast program.

Syracuse Library Foundation Fund expanded its Summer Blast program to 14 courses. Now in its third year, kids engaged in a week of learning and fun with classes like 'Can't Stop Coding' and 'Veterinarians in Training.' "Nebraska Community Foundation assisted us in developing dreams and goals for our endowment," said FAC member Joy Stilmock. "Our goal was to enhance educational opportunities. Our teachers are teaching exactly as it should be done—collaboratively, interactively, and hands-on, utilizing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Kids don't even realize how much they are learning. They are having fun and there are no tests!" ■

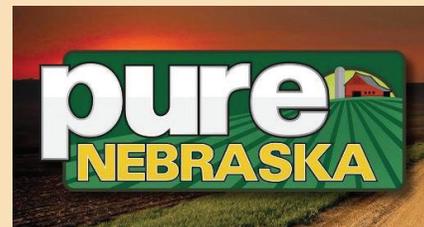


Recent high school graduate and cross country champ Ben Arens "paid it forward" by contributing prize money to Brown County Community Foundation Fund.

**NCF 25 |
TURN IT UP!
DREAM.**

Turn it Up!

Join us at the Holthus Convention Center in York on Thursday, November 14, 2019 for a full day of incredible peer learning and an evening filled with celebration as we turn up our dream switch for the next 25 years. Watch for registration details coming soon!



Turn it On!

We're happy to continue our partnership with KOLN/KGIN TV's morning program, "Pure Nebraska," for another six months. The daily morning show has featured NCF communities each month since January. The station has agreed to continue shining a light on our volunteers and hearing from our president and CEO, Jeff Yost. You can find all the videos at www.1011now.com/purenebraska.

Sign Up!

If you are not on our e-newsletter mailing list you are missing out on a ton of great information, stories, and inspiration! Find our sign-up form at the bottom of any page of our website!

Planning for Impact

With NCF's dramatic growth, several community-based funds now have more than \$1 million in unrestricted endowments. Together we are asking, "Are we giving it away well?"

After surpassing its challenge grant goal and receiving a bequest of \$317,000, Butler County Area Foundation Fund has more than \$1.3 million in its unrestricted endowment. An additional \$1 million is held in the Fund's 15 other accounts—all but three of which are endowed.

"With significantly more dollars to award, we are looking at previous grants in an effort to be more targeted with the new funds, earmarking them to more strategic efforts. NCF is helping by leading us through a 'big picture thinking' process. The recent challenge grant and attending the annual training really moved us out of our comfort zone," said BCAFF chair Mike Moravec.

More FAC leaders are reaching out to NCF as they move from raising money to spending it. First, they must know their



Children's librarian Lucy Watts engages youngsters at Hruska Memorial Library in David City. Butler County Area Foundation Fund is a longtime supporter of impactful programs through the local library.

community well. That means looking at real data, not just assumptions.

Then they need to know themselves. The Butler County FAC examined 99 grants made over the past 10 years to determine which type of grant had a long-lasting, positive impact, and who benefited. By developing a strategic framework for grantmaking, the Fund will be able to justify saying "no" to a request, and to

proactively pursue partnerships beyond the typical grant application.

Nebraska Community Foundation is developing a process for guiding communities with high capacity and readiness through these types of planning efforts. Our annual training in November may help move more FAC leaders "out of their comfort zone" toward higher levels of community impact. ■

Stewardship: A Family Tradition

Billie Wisnieski comes from a culture of stepping up and giving back. She is a founding member and treasurer of the Howells Community Fund. Gifts from her parents' estate gave an early boost to the Fund's unrestricted endowment campaign. Recently, we visited with Billie to talk about her own estate plan to include the Howells Community Fund as a beneficiary.

"I wanted to do good for more than one or two people. My planned gift will go to the Howells Community Fund. That way it will benefit several hundred people. After all, there are more than 600 in Howells!" Billie said.

"My gift is simply a bequest in my will. For me it was easy. There are some stipulations for my nieces and nephews and a few other organizations, but by far the largest designation will be for Howells. I have no stipulations as to how it should be used, because I know my gift will be used to do good in the future."

Billie explained her motivation. "It all comes back to stewardship of your hometown. You have to step up, to set the example, because if you are not willing to give back, how can you ask others to do so? It's about how you feel about your hometown and what you need to do to make things happen." ■



Billie Wisnieski, treasurer of the Howells Community Fund, is acknowledged for making her planned gift to benefit the Fund and her hometown.

Coleridge Envisions a Bright Future

Last winter, Coleridge (pop. 473) in Northeast Nebraska experienced a white-out. It wasn't a weather condition. It was a community transformation. The interior of the dingy building—originally a flat storage grain bin which had served as a community center for decades—was scrubbed down, trimmed up, re-lit and painted bright white. All within two weekends in February.

Only a few months after joining NCF, the Coleridge Area Fund Advisory Committee wanted their first project to “make a splash.” The Village covered \$5,500 in expenses, and the FAC, area contractors, and several other volunteers provided at least 400 hours of labor.

“People were impressed,” said George Hefner, Village Board chair and member of the FAC. “In fact, some people were awed by it!” he said.

Raising awareness is a challenge for any new fund. Having gone through NCF's action planning helped, said FAC treasurer Mary Biltloft. “We would not

have known where to start.” In Coleridge there had been stop-and-go efforts with other community betterment groups in the past, but they were never sustained.

“After looking at several options, we decided to go with NCF because of its track record,” George said. “NCF helped us get started and has continued to support us. Our FAC returned from annual training in Norfolk truly

energized. And I've been impressed with the success stories coming from the members of the Brown County and Rock County funds.”

The next step is to get started with fundraising. All nine current members have made their financial commitments, and they are counting on their friends, families and neighbors to follow their lead and share their vision. ■



Members of the Coleridge community enjoy their newly brightened surroundings in the local community center.

Funds Created for Flood Recovery

As time creates emotional distance for those not impacted by this spring's disastrous flooding, the crisis has not subsided for thousands of our fellow citizens who will need help for years.

To meet this challenge, NCF has established three funds dedicated to recovery and rebuilding in our communities: NBA Bank on Nebraska Strong Fund, sponsored by the Nebraska Bankers Association; Rebuild the Heartland Community Fund, sponsored by First National Bank of Omaha; and Nebraska Flood Recovery Fund, established by the Ethel S.

Abbott Charitable Foundation to assist those affected, especially low-income Nebraskans. As of July 5, 2019, these funds have raised \$1,468,453.

We have been inspired by stories from organizations like the Lincoln Track Club, whose members issued a call to action answered by 900 runners in more than 25 states through donations that were matched to total more than \$120,000 to benefit the Rebuild the Heartland Community Fund.

Or the Bassett and Springview student athletes who decided to forgo their

annual spring trip and give the money they had raised—about \$5,000—to help a family in the Niobrara-Verdigre area who lost everything.

Rebuilding our communities will require a long-term commitment as well as financial resources. Thankfully, those are assets we hold in abundance. Within a couple weeks after being flooded, the people of St. Edward chose to move forward with their plan to build a new community center!

Visit www.nebcommfound.org to learn about and donate to these funds. ■

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BACK TO OUR HOMETOWNS

NCF reserves the back page of our newsletter to share stories and insights from NCF volunteers who are making a home in Greater Nebraska.



Love brought Lorena Beckius from her hometown in Ambato, Ecuador to her new home in Ogallala. There she devotes her free time to numerous volunteer organizations including Keith County Foundation Fund.



Lorena (Lore) Beckius arrived in Ogallala in 2002 as a Rotary youth exchange student. “The smell of cows and seeing somebody in a hat and boots was something new and completely different,” said Lore. She calls Ogallala’s iconic Front Street “stuff you see in the movies.” Lore spent her senior year in Ogallala and accepted her diploma with her Nebraska classmates in 2003.

After graduation, she returned to her family in Ambato, Ecuador and began work toward a college degree. Two years in, she was invited to return to Nebraska for a friend’s wedding in Kearney; it was there that she reconnected with David, the man who would eventually become her husband and father to their

three-and-a-half-year-old twins, Luke and Landon.

Though David and Lore spent some time living in Omaha, they felt a strong pull to return to Keith County. Today, at home in Ogallala, they work for the same car dealership, love spending weekends at Lake McConaughy, and are teaching their sons to speak both Spanish and English.

Lore also devotes a significant amount of time giving back to her community and serves on numerous volunteer organizations. “It’s exciting to work with the Keith County Foundation Fund because we know we can make a difference,” said Lore.

KCFF’s capacity to make an impact recently increased tenfold when the Fund received a \$7 million anonymous gift to its unrestricted endowment. As a Fund Advisory Committee member, Lore will share the responsibility of determining where funds—over \$400,000 annually—should go and

with which organizations KCFF should partner to support larger scale projects.

“This is just an amazing community. The people in Ogallala are unique. They are so genuine, giving, and they care about each other. I’m just very lucky to call it home.”

Hear Lore’s full story (in her own words) at www.nebcommfound.org/news/category/at-home-in-greater-nebraska.

There you’ll also find dozens of accounts from inspiring stayers, returners and newcomers. Learn why these ambitious community builders are choosing to make their home in Greater Nebraska and what their hometowns are doing to attract young families. ■