

Homegrown Challenges Take Local Philanthropy to New Heights

THIS YEAR Nebraska Community Foundation celebrates 30 years of building stronger communities and a Greater Nebraska. Our spring newsletter cover story discussed the exponential growth community-based unrestricted endowments have experienced thanks to the dedication and generosity of Nebraskans near and far. Today 88 communities are building unrestricted endowments—financial resources that will be at their disposal forever—totaling \$67 million, double the total from just five years ago. Fifty communities in the NCF network have endowments topping \$250,000; sixteen exceed \$1 million.

This wasn't always the case. In the 90s and early 2000s, when Nebraska Community Foundation was just getting off the ground, there were only a few dots on the map representing communities in the network. Longtime NCF employees—like Jana Jensen, Amy Fey, Teri Alley-Davis, and Jeff Yost—often talk about the trepidation early NCF adopters experienced as they joined what was then a little-known, fledgling organization touting the importance of something called an unrestricted endowment.

Today 245 affiliated funds serve 270 communities in every corner of the state. Those early collaborators and visionaries have successfully grown some of the largest community-based endowments in the NCF network, forever changing the course of history.



Honorary NCF Board member Greg Vasek (left) convened fellow Leigh alumni to challenge members of the Leigh Legacy Fund (like local teacher Justine Fischer, second from left) to grow an endowment that will forever benefit future generations.

"My hope for the next 30 years is that the mission behind NCF starts to really come alive in communities all across the state. We all want to be a part of that mission," said Alisha Juelfs of Sidney, which established a community-based affiliated fund in 2023.

Homegrown challenges have been an essential ingredient to endowment growth over the past 30 years. Today nine communities across the network—like Boone County and Shickley—have assembled their own challenge opportunities leveraging local generosity from individuals, couples, families, businesses, and, in the case of Leigh (pop. 400), a group of "Distinguished Alumni" who still care deeply about their hometown.

That challenge kicked off in January 2023 when 14 families and individuals (all Leigh High School alumni who have

moved away) joined together to pledge \$200,000 and challenge members of the Leigh Legacy Fund (LLF) to raise another \$500,000 for its unrestricted endowment.

In just 16 months, LLF exceeded the challenge, securing over 130 donations and pledges totaling \$590,000 from current and former residents. As a result, Leigh's unrestricted endowment will grow to nearly \$1 million.

"We are truly humbled by everyone's generosity and grateful to the donors who brought us this far, but we aren't done yet," said Fund Advisory Committee member Justine Fischer. "We are going to continue to dream big and see how high we can take this thing." ■

CONNECT TO NCF

Dear Young Nebraskan,

MY SINCERE HOPE is that I am just one of many people in your life saying this: we need and want you here in Nebraska.

Members of Generation Z possess so many of the characteristics that are necessary and vital to the future, especially in rural Nebraska. Your unwavering commitment to inclusivity is precisely what is required to help change the long-held misconceptions people have about our state. Nebraska is a place where everyone belongs.

Your open-mindedness and entrepreneurial spirit will help drive the innovations that will catapult our state into the future. Have goals of starting your own business one day? There are few better places to pursue your dreams than Greater Nebraska. I speak with homegrown entrepreneurs every day who credit their success to community support, something they say they never would have found in a big city.

Did you know U.S. News and World Report ranked Nebraska as the third-best state to live? We're third in fiscal stability, fourth in infrastructure, and ninth in natural environment. Nebraska



Jeff Yost, NCF President and CEO

is also within the top 20 for economy, education, and opportunity. Kids Count placed Nebraska ninth for children's wellbeing. WalletHub ranked Nebraska fourth in its list of the best states to raise a family. See? You don't have to be from Nebraska to recognize it's something special.

Gen Z, you crave purpose, not just a paycheck. The research shows young Nebraskans and other members of your generation are values driven, perhaps more so than any generation before you. You are attracted to work—be it paid or volunteer—that lights your fire. In

Greater Nebraska, the opportunities for this kind of work are abundant. In fact, we work with thousands of volunteers of all ages who share your desire to leave the world better than you found it. Trust us, they are looking for bright minds and passionate hearts just like yours to lead the way.

But perhaps your generation's most admirable quality is your authenticity—something that will serve you well in the leadership roles you fill in the future. Your awareness of mental health is long overdue and something that would benefit those before you.

Dear Young Nebraskan, know that we—your elders—see ourselves in you. We too once felt misunderstood and underappreciated. Sometimes our eagerness for change was met with doubt and negativity. But without change, there cannot be progress. Dear Young Nebraskan, stick with it. Our future depends on you. ■

Together a Greater Nebraska!
Jeff Yost, President and CEO



In May, Nebraska Community Foundation welcomed 22 Hometown Interns from across Greater Nebraska who will spend their summer working for their local NCF affiliated fund and uncovering the abundant local assets in their place.

Pictured are (front row) Chloe Hintz, Youth Engagement Intern; Jady Schultis, Diller Community Foundation Fund*; Bailey Schwarz, Arnold Community Fund; Takaylynn Hergott, Youth Engagement Intern*; Hallie Pulliam, Hebron Community Fund; Mariah Sliva, Shickley Community Foundation Fund*; Hannah Miller, Shickley Community Foundation Fund; Blair Fiala, Howells Community Fund; Jordan Mireles, Perkins County Community Foundation Fund; Caleb Most, Keith County Foundation Fund; (back row) Rachel Orth, Youth Engagement Intern*; Johanna Ford, Bertrand Area Community Fund; Mallory Denner, Diller Community Foundation Fund; Bryn Kniep, Deshler Community Foundation Fund; Gracy Utecht, Red Cloud Community Fund; Shelby Steyer, Friend Area Fund; Kate Kratzer, Sidney And Greater Area Fund; Jake Cerny, Dorchester Community Fund; Allie Cosgrove, Rock County Community Fund; and Ally Sedlacek, Holt County Economic Development. Not pictured: Kaegen Held, Leigh Legacy Fund and Vickie Ference, Valley County Community Foundation Fund. *Indicates a returning intern.*

NCF Team Updates



JEAN HINTON is NCF's new Office and Gift Processing Assistant. Prior to joining NCF, Hinton worked at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in a variety of administrative and supportive roles for a cumulative 16 years. Her experience handling confidential data and helping departments stay organized will be an asset to the NCF team. Hinton obtained a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.



MAGGIE SMITH joined NCF as the Affiliated Fund Development Coordinator for Northeast Nebraska. Smith most recently served as Director of Economic Development and Housing for Albion Economic Development Corporation. She obtained a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education-Leadership and a Master of Science in Leadership Education-Human Resource Development from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



JIM GUSTAFSON, who served as the Director of Advancement and Gift Planning for many years before his most recent role as Gift Planning Advisor, retired in May. Gustafson joined NCF on a full-time basis in 2005. Prior to that, he worked with NCF as a consultant beginning in 1998. His work continues to have an incredible impact as he helped donors across the state fulfill their dreams of building and sustaining stronger, more prosperous Nebraska hometowns. He has connected countless generous Nebraskans with the causes that matter to them most—from children's dental health to community facilities, youth engagement, capitalizing community unrestricted endowments, and much more.

NEBRASKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
2024 ANNUAL CELEBRATION AND TRAINING

30 30 YEARS OF BUILDING
A GREATER NEBRASKA
BEYOND

LINCOLN, NE | NOVEMBER 14, 2024

Join us to celebrate NCF's 30th anniversary and the remarkable achievements of thousands of ambitious Nebraskans fueled by their love of community and fervent commitment to the big dreams of tomorrow and beyond.

Watch for event details, session descriptions, and registration on our social media channels and at www.nebcommfound.org/celebrate.

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CONNECT TO IMPACT



SHICKLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUND helped put two new welders in the hands of Shickley Agriculture Education students, allowing them to gain real world skills. The opportunity to practice welding has helped students gain an understanding of the tools necessary to work in the industry and knowledge of what future careers may be available. Many students will be able to use these lessons as they look towards life after high school. Several of the students have committed to returning to the Shickley area after college to build businesses in the area.

An NCF Youth Engagement Grant, made possible by an anonymous donor, helped fund the purchase of the welders. These grants have supported numerous good works across Nebraska in recent years, including greenhouse projects in Friend and Arnold; musical instruments in Shickley; The Valley Child Development Center in Red Cloud; summer reading programs in numerous communities; and more. ■

Shickley Agriculture Education students work with new welders supported in part by a grant from the Shickley Community Foundation Fund.

STUART COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUND (SCFF) recently concluded its fifth consecutive youth survey, offering invaluable insights for adults working with youth in the area. With these data, stakeholders can customize support programs, educational initiatives, and resources to better meet the evolving needs of local youth, ultimately fostering a more resilient and empowered community.

“Some things they suggest are simple and can be done, some are not realistic, some are spot on,” said Jay Wallinger of SCFF. “But in the end, they feel heard, and because of that may decide Stuart is a great place to return to and we are opening the door for them to know they can help shape our future.” ■

Stuart Community Foundation Fund’s ongoing dedication to conducting youth surveys offers volunteers insights while bringing youth into planning for the future.



Attendees listen as students explain their business plans during Sidney’s first ever Youth Entrepreneurship Competition.

THE SIDNEY AND CHEYENNE COUNTY Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (E3) program hosted its first ever Youth Entrepreneurship Competition last winter. The group had students take an entrepreneurship class during the fall semester. Each student created a business, drafted a business plan, and presented their idea to attendees.

“All of these students were so impressive, and I think it’s fair to say that while not all could win a prize, all will win moving forward with the skills they gained in this class,” said Sarah Sinnett, an NCF Board member who lives in Sidney. “Before announcing awards, we made sure to let them know we want them back home one day.” ■



Members of the Byron Volunteer Department pose for a photo shortly after receiving a generous \$350,000 estate gift from a nearby farmer who benefited from their services.

ROCK COUNTY COMMUNITY FUND (RCCF) broke ground on a long-awaited community center this spring. The project began with an estate gift followed by RCCF issuing a \$250,000 challenge in 2021, which the community met in less than a year. Overall, with local donations and grants, RCCF and the City of Bassett have secured \$1.8 million in contributions toward the project. Now, RCCF is ready to begin final fundraising efforts.

“This is very exciting,” said FAC member Larry Buell. “I think it’s a great opportunity for Rock County. This is something we’ve needed for quite a few years. It’s been a dream for many, and now it’s taking place.” ■

Rock County Community Fund’s Mike Lezotte, Larry Buell, and Dennis Swanson pose for a photo at the future location of the new community center.



Wausa’s community pool will be full of skilled swimmers this summer after Wausa Community Foundation Fund again provided free group swimming lessons for children.

WAUSA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUND again supported summer fun and safety by providing free group swimming lessons for children in the community. The CDC recently reported a 10% increase in accidental drowning deaths since 2020—drowning deaths among children between 1 and 4 years old increased by 28% in the same time period.

Experts say one of the most important factors in preventing drowning fatalities is water competency, which includes swimming lessons from an early age. Through this grant, Wausa Community Foundation Fund is helping teach children a vital and invaluable skill. ■

BYRON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUND (BCFF) partnered with the local volunteer fire and rescue department to quasi-endow a \$350,000 estate gift from Ward Aurand. Decades ago, the department responded to a fire on Aurand’s land. Responders’ dedication to putting out the fire and standing watch over any hot spots left an impression on Aurand.

BCFF Advisory Committee Chair Jeremy Heitmann, who is also a captain on the fire department, said the gift allows more budget flexibility, especially because it will be endowed and generate an annual payout. “It’s a pretty amazing gift.” ■



VALLEY COUNTY HEALTH SYSTEM FOUNDATION FUND (VCHSFF) granted \$300,000 to support equipment needs at Valley County Health System, including endoscopes, colonoscopes, and a glidescope. VCHSFF utilized payouts from their endowment accounts, like the Geweke Family Endowment and the Phyllis Malottke Endowment, to fund the grants. VCHSFF’s endowment resources now total over \$4.2 million.

Rural hospitals across the country face many challenges, but robust endowments and thoughtful stewards can help their local healthcare systems get the tools they need to provide necessary care and attract the next generation of medical professionals.

“Generous donations help offset rising costs of health equipment to keep our facility up to date,” said OR Surgery Manager Julie Klimek. “This makes our hospital appealing for patients and helps us retain highly qualified specialists that see the importance of offering specialized care to our rural community.” ■

OR Surgery Manager Julie Klimek and Dr. Christopher Seip say philanthropy has played a critical role in Valley County Health System’s ability to provide state-of-the-art, lifesaving care to those living in the region.



Got a great story? Contact:

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CONNECT TO LEGACY



WAYS TO LEAVE FIVE Retirement Assets

Nebraska Community Foundation's Five to Thrive campaign asks you to consider leaving just five percent of your assets to your favorite hometown or to NCF to benefit all of our communities. If we all left five, that's well over \$5 billion that could be reinvested in our communities over the next 10 years. When we all leave five, our hometowns thrive!

Most people will not use all of their retirement assets during their lifetimes. You can make a gift of your unused retirement assets, such as your IRA, 401(k), 403(b), pension or other tax-deferred plan, to help further progress in your community and relieve your heirs of the heavy tax implications that come with inheriting a retirement account.

To leave your retirement assets to NCF or one of our affiliated funds, you will need to complete a simple beneficiary designation form provided by your retirement plan custodian. If you designate NCF or an affiliated fund as beneficiary, we will benefit from the full value of your gift because as a charity, we are not taxed upon receiving an IRA or other retirement plan assets. ■

Learn how to join the Five to Thrive movement at www.fivetothrive.org

A Big Little Gift of Gratitude

TIM AND JUDY LICHTI feel endlessly thankful for everything Shickley has given to them. It's where they raised their four children, where they built their life, and where Tim's father and uncle established Lichti Oil, the family business Tim oversaw for 40 years.

The couple is aware of the ways their family has benefited from the community, which is why they decided on a planned gift as one avenue of saying thank you. Their gift, by way of a beneficiary designation on retirement accounts, will go to the Shickley Community Foundation Fund's (SCFF) unrestricted endowment, empowering future generations to continue the work of volunteers who came before.

"We were in business for 68 years, and the community's always been good to us," Tim said. "It's a gift of gratitude."

Together the Lichtis, their attorney, and several NCF staff members worked to organize the gift. It was all very painless, Judy said. Working with NCF on the gift was an easy decision after years of collaboration through the affiliated fund.

"It's really been a benefit to Shickley to be affiliated with Nebraska Community Foundation," Tim said. "It's been huge, just with the resources they provide for how to network and fundraise."

SCFF has successfully matched two challenges in the last 20 years, amounting to more than \$1 million. Those challenges have allowed SCFF to build a \$2.1 million unrestricted endowment with enough annual payout to make grants toward causes important to the community, such as the school, early childhood education, the local hospital, leadership programs, and more.

Judy became more involved with SCFF in 2012, during the Fund's push to meet a \$750,000 challenge. Having served on the FAC for multiple years, she understands the great responsibility inherent in stewarding others' gifts for the improvement of Shickley. She is honored to feel trusted with those gifts, and she wants future volunteers to feel the same.

"It's a good feeling to know you're trusted, and I want those people in the future to know they're trusted," she said. "We trust them with our gift." ■

Judy and Tim Lichti decided a planned gift was one avenue to thank their hometown of Shickley for providing a place to raise their children and grow their business.



Norfolk Family of Funds Collaborate on Shared Vision



The Norfolk Family of Funds recently hosted a performance during which Kathy Heard of Howells and NCF's Todd Mekelburg shared their personal reasons for making planned gifts to benefit Nebraska hometowns.

IN NORFOLK, multiple affiliated funds are well-known to some but not others. That's why representatives of those funds have been meeting regularly over the past year to devise ways to increase awareness and encourage even more charitable giving.

Leading the way is the Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund (NACFF), joined by many donor-advised funds (DAFs) including the Beckenhauer Construction DAF, Faltys Family DAF, the Connie Fund, Daycos4Good, McIntosh Family DAF, and the Rudy Elis Fund. They call themselves the Norfolk Family of Funds.

Their combined endowed resources near \$8 million, generating an annual payout of about \$330,000 if pooled together. On their own, these funds have already made significant investments: NACFF has awarded \$2 million in grants since its inception; the Elis Fund has granted \$1.16 million to youth improvement programs; and Daycos4Good has invested \$200,000 into the community since 2016.

The longest-running family-based fund is the Connie Fund, established in 1998 by the late Connie Day of Norfolk through a \$500,000 life insurance policy. Earnings from her endowment have funded more than \$500,000 in programs designed to improve the lives of children and young adults in northeast Nebraska.

This spring, the Norfolk Family of Funds thanked volunteers and donors by hosting a performance of "The Wonder Bread Years," a one-person show by Nebraska-born comedian Pat Hazell. The event, held at the Johnny Carson Theatre in Norfolk, featured opportunities for guests to learn more about the Norfolk Family of Funds and NCF's Five to Thrive campaign.

The assembled funds are part of the larger Philanthropy Council of Northeast Nebraska. NACFF established an account in 2010 to further the council's work to foster a culture of giving in the region. The effort currently comprises about 35 collaborative partners from area non-profit organizations that come together to share resources and support the council's mission.

The promise of the Norfolk Family of Funds is one of large-scale, long-term collaboration where many voices are called to sit at the greater community-building table. As their experiment continues, the entire NCF network will be watching. ■

What is a Donor-Advised Fund?

The NCF network includes many donor-advised funds (DAFs) making big impacts in the communities they serve, such as those working with the Norfolk Family of Funds. The Brad and Nancy Sherwood Donor-Advised Fund, for instance, has helped the town of Red Cloud reach remarkable heights. Its considerable gifts made possible The Valley Child Development Center as well as ongoing strides in the community's heritage tourism work.

Research throughout the nonprofit industry indicates that DAFs represent the fastest-growing area of philanthropy, according to Patrick Schmitt, co-CEO of FreeWill.

A donor-advised fund might be a great solution for you. You can use a DAF to distribute gifts to numerous charities. With a DAF, you can make gifts to charity during your lifetime, and when you pass away, your children can carry on your legacy of giving.

Here's how it works:

1. You make an initial, irrevocable gift of cash or appreciated assets to fund a DAF at a sponsoring organization, such as NCF.
2. The assets in your DAF grow tax-free.
3. You make annual recommendations on gifts to be made from your DAF. ■

FOR HELP PLANNING YOUR LEGACY, CONTACT:

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CONNECTIONS

Summer 2024

Inside this issue:

- NCF celebrates 30 years of homegrown philanthropy
- A message to young Nebraskans
- Affiliated fund updates
- Donor-advised funds offer opportunity

Imperial Community Foundation Fund's grants toward the community's art park have helped turn a once-empty lot into a space to be enjoyed, appreciated, and shared by residents of all ages.