

a magazine for friends of the **GREATER MILWAUKEE FOUNDATION**

GREATER together



**At the heart
of the
COMMUNITY**

 Greater Milwaukee
FOUNDATION
greater together

Volume 9 Issue 1 Summer 2024

GREATER together

A MAGAZINE FOR FRIENDS OF THE
GREATER MILWAUKEE FOUNDATION
VOLUME 9 :: ISSUE 1 :: SUMMER 2024

VISION Greater Milwaukee becomes a vibrant, economically thriving region comprised of welcoming and inclusive communities that provide opportunity, prosperity and a high quality of life for all.

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ON THE COVER:



Milwaukee visual artist Nehemiah "Nemo" Edwards and a community member who helped him with "Together We Thrive," a piece of art that will be featured on the first floor of ThriveOn King.

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WHAT'S inside

SUMMER 2024



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Area residents expressed their desire for art throughout ThriveOn King to reflect the rich history of the Bronzeville area. Milwaukee artist Nehemiah "Nemo" Edwards worked with more than 50 children on his piece, "Together We Thrive." He is one of more than 20 artists contributing art to the building.

From the sun-drenched, Chicago-style windows of our new home on North Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, I see a neighborhood alive with activity and brimming with hope. A community long undervalued by those beyond its borders is showing all of Milwaukee that equitable investment in the people's priorities leads to thriving spaces. I am so proud that the Greater Milwaukee Foundation has made it our mission to walk alongside community – in understanding and partnership – toward our shared vision of a Milwaukee for all.

That promise has led us here, to ThriveOn King! We have been talking about and planning for the Foundation's relocation to this catalytic redevelopment for years, and at last, the moment arrived this spring. Today, you will find us truly embedded in the community we serve, conducting our work from this former department store-turned-community hub at the intersection of the Halyard Park, Harambee and Brewers Hill neighborhoods.

That the community has welcomed us into their lives, allowed us to be stewards of this precious, historic building and engaged with us every step of the way only happens through trusted relationships. The entire ThriveOn Collaboration, which we created with the Medical College of Wisconsin and Royal Capital, is made to reflect and act upon ideas and solutions identified by the community.

Further emblematic of the deep partnership that has made this transcendent chapter in our story possible is the support and engagement of our donors. Their contributions to the

transformation of our physical space and the community priorities in which we are investing have been extraordinary.

Centering community in our work is far more than a headline in a strategic plan. It is a seismic shift in how we operate internally, how we make decisions through shared leadership, where we deploy resources, and how we use our institutional voice to support the ideas of those who know their community best and join them in advocating for change.

The ThriveOn Collaboration's generational commitment extends well beyond the ThriveOn King building's walls, but the place itself does matter. It represents a convergence of community, especially on the first floor, where you will find partners working in early childhood education, workforce development, health research and training, wellness and more.

From the stunning and culturally significant artwork showcasing the past, present and future of Bronzeville, to the gathering spaces on both the first floor and our fourth floor headquarters, to the housing units under construction – you have every reason to visit us at ThriveOn King, and I hope you will, again and again.

Ellen M. Gilligan
President & CEO
Greater Milwaukee Foundation

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COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY

EQUITY, INNOVATION AND IMPACT



President and CEO Ellen Gilligan in a collaboration space within the Foundation's fourth floor office at ThriveOn King.



Ellen Gilligan reflects on transformative achievements, challenges during her 14-year tenure

When we introduced Ellen Gilligan to the community in 2010 as our new president and CEO, we highlighted her strong track record of developing creative and innovative solutions to meet community needs.

It wasn't long after putting down roots in Milwaukee that she began building upon that record to benefit residents and organizations throughout the greater Milwaukee area. Within a year, for example, she helped launch Milwaukee Succeeds, a communitywide partnership that has grown to become a leader in collaborative educational systems change.

The Foundation had earned a strong and trusted reputation in the community as a 100-plus year old steward of generosity in the region. Described by community leaders and peers as a servant leader who is both a learner and a doer, Gilligan has positioned the Foundation as an innovative community leader, convener and catalyst, working across sectors to mobilize resources to address our community's greatest opportunities and challenges.

During her tenure, the Foundation has more than doubled its operating budget, awarded more than \$774 million in grants and raised \$731 million in new gifts and promises, including the largest single gift in the Foundation's history in 2014.

In our cover story, Gilligan looks back at her time as leader of Wisconsin's largest community foundation and the legacy she leaves, as she prepares for retirement.



Greg Wesley, ThriveOn Collaboration co-chair; Ellen Gilligan; John Raymond, president and CEO of the Medical College of Wisconsin; Travis Landry, ThriveOn Collaboration advisory council member; and Kevin Newell, president and CEO of Royal Capital

Q & A WITH ELLEN GILLIGAN

Q: In the era of your presidency, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation has gone from one of the community's best kept secrets to one of the most prominent and influential catalysts for change in the region. This is not a coincidence. Your pioneering leadership, bold ideas and commitment to inclusive collaboration have guided this transformation. When you look at the Foundation today, what do you see?

A: First and foremost, I see the Foundation as 100 percent committed to our shared vision of a Milwaukee for all. We are looking holistically at how we can invest, how we can partner and how we can change inequitable systems so that everyone in our community has the opportunity to thrive. And that takes all of us – not just me, not just the Foundation, not one sector, but all of us aiming toward the best community outcomes. What I have really tried to emphasize in my position is how the community is calling on us to be a leader in this space, and it's our role to deliver on that promise. That's a role we've grown into, and we're still growing. Philanthropy has done a lot of good in Milwaukee through the years, but more is possible. We have been building on the traditional elements of a community foundation that

serves donors and their philanthropic interests and adding new capabilities to serve the broader community. Today we are using every tool in our toolbox – whether that is convening stakeholders to develop solutions to community challenges, advocating for awareness or changes to public policy, deploying capital into neighborhoods in new ways, or ensuring all voices and all forms of philanthropy are welcome at the Foundation. That's what it looks like to follow our North Star of racial equity and inclusion, and to build a Milwaukee for all.

Q: What do you view as the most significant change that has occurred over the past 14 years?

A: Obviously, our asset growth is tremendously important. I also think the growth of visibility and increased understanding of the importance of the Foundation as a community leadership organization in Milwaukee is critically important. I also would say the trust that we have gained. I go back to our a Milwaukee for all vision and strategic plan, which really changed the nature of the way communities of color particularly have viewed the Foundation. We've built tremendous trust, not only with partners and stakeholders in the communities we serve

but among our donors and a broader cross section of communities. It is critically important to me that we made these generational commitments and that we carry them forward and make good on our promises.

Q: How have you noticed the shift in trust?

A: I think the most apparent way is with our work with the ThriveOn Collaboration. Five years ago, we stood on an empty stage in a vacant warehouse with a number of community residents and stakeholders and made a bold commitment. Our community engagement, our community listening sessions, our responding from a multitude of ways about what is in the ThriveOn King building, how we show up there, how our staff interacts with community and stakeholders – that is certainly an important indication of partnering with community. Milwaukee Succeeds is another. The engagement of ambassadors around early childhood education who are parents and caregivers on the front lines of advocating for change with state government is a very different way for community foundations to operate. That has created trust that we are in this together. We are working side by side with the community on many, many issues.

Q: There were certainly a lot of historic firsts during your tenure – the largest gift in 2014; a historic campaign; reaching \$1 billion in assets – what are the moments that stand out for you?

A: It is the journey we've been on around our broader role in the community as a community leadership organization. The milestones I would pick out are all

related to indicators of that. I am very proud of launching Milwaukee Succeeds, the first ever cradle-to-career partnership focused on equitable outcomes for children in all schools and putting early childhood education on everybody's agenda. Also, On the Table MKE, which really engaged a very broad cross section of 5,000 or more people across the region to talk about how to make Milwaukee a better place for everyone to live and identified the challenges we need to address. We had never done anything like that before. People came out and embraced it and loved it. Our COVID response was a huge milestone. Not only did we act quickly, but we convened funders across the region. We have been both focused on immediate needs in all these things and long-term systems change. We were one of the founders of and a key partner in the Community Development Alliance and the first comprehensive housing plan for the city. ThriveOn King is enormous. Our first ever historic campaign successfully completed, exceeding the \$700 million goal. Internally, the Foundation is not the same organization as when I entered. The staff, the policies, the Board, the practices, the culture are different. I would say I'm very proud of those changes that really help us become what we aspire to be.

Q: How do you think the Foundation is viewed by our peers compared to 14 years ago?

A: Milwaukee is seen as a leader in the field in many ways. We are a part of a larger foundation group of the top 30 community foundations. Many community foundations in that group have a larger asset base, but



One of the pinnacles of Gilligan's career at the Foundation has been the ThriveOn Collaboration, the historic, community-based partnership between the Foundation, Medical College of Wisconsin and Royal Capital that is focused on creating a Milwaukee that is equitable, healthy and thriving for all.

I would say that some of the work we are doing is work that people are trying to figure out how to do – centering community voice, focusing on educational outcomes, housing. A number of people across the country are working on affordable housing, and we just got an award from HUD for our work with the Community Development Alliance. We are fighting above our weight class for a city the size of Milwaukee in many ways. People are responding to our courageous stance as a community foundation to say we are making a generational commitment to advance racial equity. It has put us in a very significant leadership role in the field.

Q: How would you say you have grown and changed as a leader?

A: I certainly have learned a tremendous amount. I would say the understanding of the importance of community voice and centering community voice in the work we do is hugely important. It is something that I have understood in an intellectual way from my experience in community development over many years, but the last decade has really changed that practice in a very different way.

Q: What was the turning point that really brought home the importance of community voice?

A: Our generational commitment to racial equity and inclusion in 2016, which preceded the murder of George Floyd and racial reckoning. Our commitment was a result of a lot of learning and the call on the part of the Board

and staff for what we as a community foundation could do to make Milwaukee a more inclusive, prosperous community for all. That was a turning point for many of us. It was a brave move on the part of the Board. It enabled me and the leadership team to be innovative, to take risks, to try things that this institution had never tried.

Q: When you first came into the position, did you envision how critical a role racial equity would play in the Foundation's work?

From the time I began my career at LISC (one of the country's largest community development organizations), I have always been very focused on how to drive resources to underserved and under-resourced communities and made a commitment to myself that this was going to be a priority for me. I didn't know how it would play out, but I knew it would be a priority.

I had done a significant amount of work in community development, neighborhood development and race issues in Cincinnati. In Cincinnati in 2001, we had civil unrest. We worked on police reform and had put together a broad-based collaboration housed at the Greater Cincinnati Foundation focused on long-term change. When I came to Milwaukee and had conversations with the Board and was toured around the community, I kept looking at the statistics of all the challenges that Milwaukee faces around racial disparities and gaps, everything from life expectancy to education outcomes.



In 2016, the Foundation centered racial equity and inclusion as its North Star. Focusing on addressing the systemic racism that holds our region back, it committed to using its resources to advance a vision of a Milwaukee for all.



Left: Ellen at a fundraising event for the Howard Fuller Collegiate Academy’s new building, located across the street from the Foundation’s new office. Right: Milwaukee Succeeds-led Milwaukee Early Childhood Education Coalition marching during the Week of the Young Child in April.

I kept thinking something doesn’t compute here. If you are downtown, driving along the lake, you would never know that a mile away, the conditions people live in are very different.

Q: What has been the most challenging aspect of your role as president/CEO?

A: The last 10 years, particularly the last five, have been difficult in every community. COVID-19 – which we are just beginning to understand the long-term impact of on society, on our children, on our workplaces, on our broader community – was a tremendous challenge. There was a long-overdue demand for racial reckoning at the same time. It was a very tumultuous time to be a leader of an organization trying to advance those things and serve the community. The political environment and the divisiveness in communities makes an organization

that is trying to serve community and bring people together very challenging.

Q: How do you navigate that?

A: My motto is you have to keep your eye on the prize, because on any given day, it can be discouraging to take on big, systemic issues like those we are trying to address. I am optimistic by nature. I don’t think I would be in this role or field for this long if I didn’t keep my eye on the prize. I feel that we, as a country, as a foundation, as a community, can take on anything we put our minds to. How do I keep going? I think having great colleagues, having mentors and people you can problem-solve with is critically important. This is about long-term change – while today might not be great, tomorrow might have tremendous breakthroughs.



Affordable housing is one of the Foundation’s priorities in its efforts to create a Milwaukee for all. It is a founding partner and principal funder of the Community Development Alliance, which is working to increase availability and affordability of housing options in Milwaukee. CDA partners with ACTS Housing and other organizations to help more Milwaukeeans become homeowners like Francisco Hernandez (above).

Q: You’ve spent 25 years of your career at community foundations – what led you to have such a long career in the field?

A: Community foundations are unique institutions in that they have the opportunity to bring together a broad cross section of people – donors, community residents, nonprofits, individual citizens – to focus on immediate problems and long-term issues that affect communities. One of the things I love about community foundations is that they are innovative, they can be nimble, they can be very creative in ways that many institutions can’t. We have the opportunity to engage in all of those issues and sectors in a way that many other organizations don’t – with a broad platform for community engagement.

Q: Why did you view it as important to serve on national boards while concurrently serving as leader of the Foundation?

A: The opportunity to be in an institution and to learn how to drive resources and build capacity to serve underserved communities is an important part of my continued education.

There were two national boards I’ve served on directly related to our work: CFLeads is the organization that is driving change within the community foundation field to

help community foundations build the capacity to lead change. I served on that board for nine years – including three as chair. We did some national research that helped document the fact that the whole field has now embraced community leadership as a fundamental practice and the capacity community foundations need. It is about amplifying impact in the community. It’s not about how many assets you have. It’s about driving change to serve your community. That was a learning ground and a leadership opportunity for me to help influence the entire field of community foundations. I will continue to serve on that board and be an adviser.

I began my career at LISC, and I have served on the national board since 2013. It is the largest community development financial institution in the country and is driving resources to underserved rural and urban communities across America. LISC opened my eyes to the needs across the country. They are not different. People want decent, affordable housing, good schools, safe communities, access to health care.

Q: What have you enjoyed most about your tenure at the Foundation?

A: Definitely the people on our team, our Board, people I’ve gotten to know and work with in the community in all sectors. Everybody is very proud of the community

we serve, and I think Milwaukee is a really special place. People love the community and want to do whatever they can to make it a better place to live for all of us. What I love the most is how much people love Milwaukee and want to lean in to make it the best it can be. So much talent. So much passion.

Q: What part of the role will you miss the most?

A: The people. Instead of retiring, I like to say that I'm rewiring, because I can't imagine I will stop working on things I care deeply about. I will continue to serve on national boards and find ways to continue my work on social and racial justice issues. It is the people and the problem-solving and the opportunity to have a group and an institution that is focused on these things on a daily basis. It's hard to walk away from that. I also believe in stepping aside to make way for new leadership.

Q: What excites you most about the Foundation's future?

A: We have a tremendously talented staff that is committed to the vision we have set out. The alignment around that is one of the things I'm most proud of. Certainly, having completed a successful campaign is a gift to the next CEO. And I'm excited about ThriveOn King, which is fundamentally going to change the way the Foundation operates, is seen in the community and partners in community for generations to come. We have been so focused on the building, but our move to ThriveOn King is the starting line, not the finish line. I think what we will see over the next decade is a very different way for the Foundation to operate. What I mean is how we show up in community, how we invest in community, how we use our investments, how we partner with neighborhood stakeholders and residents in different ways, how we partner and accelerate our partnership with MCW, how we collaborate with partners on the first floor and what we'll do to address social determinants of health over the next generation. That is tremendously exciting to me.

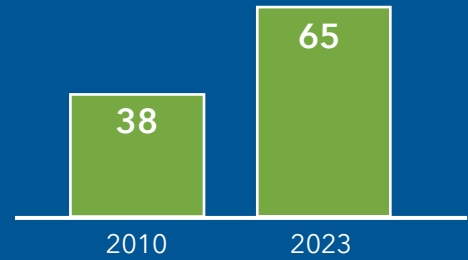
Q: What is important for your successor to know, do and learn?

A: The change in the field is phenomenal. It's breathtaking, not just in terms of the rapid change of people retiring or leaving but also who is coming into the field from the perspective of the variety of professional experience. Leadership that reflects our communities in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. It's totally different than it was when I walked into that room of larger community foundations 14 years ago. What I would say to the new leader is to get out of the office and visit every neighborhood, every organization you can and understand what residents need in the communities we are serving.

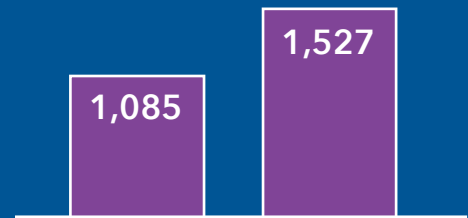
By the numbers

Ellen Gilligan joined the Foundation in September 2010, becoming the third leader in our history. Under her leadership, the Foundation has grown in size and broadened, as well as deepened, our impact in the community.

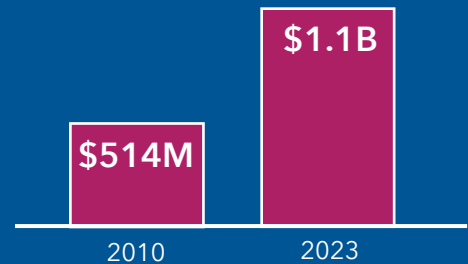
TOTAL STAFF



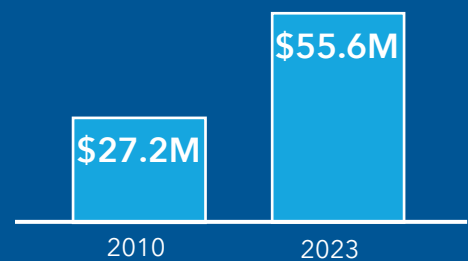
TOTAL FUNDS



TOTAL ASSETS



TOTAL GRANTS



MILESTONE MOMENTS

As president and CEO, Ellen Gilligan has increasingly elevated the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's role as a community leader, convener and catalyst, bringing diverse stakeholders together around a shared vision for a vibrant region. Below are some of the milestones throughout her tenure.



Generational commitment to racial equity and inclusion

The Foundation publicly declares its generational commitment to racial equity and inclusion in 2016, building on a journey of internal learning, incremental progress and investment begun over a decade earlier. Our Board's definitive commitment established a new normal that centered racial equity and inclusion as our North Star.

Collective impact partnership created to address education in Milwaukee

The Foundation launches Milwaukee Succeeds, a cradle-to-career, communitywide education partnership, in 2011. In collaboration with lived experience partners, the partnership has grown to become a leader in expanding access to early childhood education for Black and Brown families and improving the high school success trajectory for Black male youth.

Foundation puts commitment to community “On the Table”

The Foundation launches On the Table MKE as a unique opportunity to build relationships with others, engage in productive dialogue and turn ideas into positive action that benefits the community in a variety of ways. From 2017 to 2020, thousands participated in bold discussions centered on race, criminal justice reform, mental health and immigration, among other topics.

New innovative tool introduced to advance equitable opportunities

The Foundation creates a \$1 million pilot program in 2017 to provide access to capital through impact investing. Often structured as equity investments or loans with favorable terms, these innovative investments deliver a financial return so funds can be reinvested in new projects, particularly in underestimated and disinvested communities. To date, the program has invested more than \$18 million in Milwaukee.

New catalytic, community-based partnership created

The Foundation, the Medical College of Wisconsin and Royal Capital establish the ThriveOn Collaboration based on a shared vision of a Milwaukee that is equitable, healthy and thriving for all. Guided by community priorities and data, the collaboration is making catalytic investments in housing, early childhood education, health and wellness, economic opportunity and social cohesion, particularly in Milwaukee’s Halyard Park, Harambee and Brewers Hill neighborhoods. Its centerpiece is ThriveOn King, a historic redevelopment and community hub that the Foundation now calls home.



Community members gather at a block party in the neighborhoods surrounding ThriveOn King.

A Milwaukee for all vision initiated

Based on years of listening and learning with the community, the Foundation shares its new strategic vision that aims to overcome the racial divisions in the region by reimagining philanthropy, catalyzing systems change, building an inclusive culture and following community voice in order to help build a Milwaukee for all.

Cross-sector coalition convened to address pandemic

The Foundation forms and leads the MKE Civic Action Team, a communitywide coalition that mobilizes funding and volunteer resources to help alleviate the profound impact of COVID-19 on physical health, mental health, early childhood education, K-12 education, shelter, and food. The innovative approach brings together funders, government, direct service providers and others to coordinate efforts, affect policy and change systems for the better.



In 2020, the Foundation spearheaded a community coalition to address education and other areas in the community impacted by COVID-19.

Historic campaign unites community around investment in lasting change

In 2023, the Foundation completes the Greater Together Campaign, the first campaign of its kind for a community foundation nationally that was both comprehensive and priority focused. It raises more than \$726 million to support the vision of a Milwaukee for all.

PEER PERSPEC



John W. Daniels Jr.

*Foundation Board member (2004-2014);
Board chair (2012-2014)*

*Chair of executive search committee
that hired Gilligan*

We were looking for someone who had real clarity around a vision of how you impact a community and could create a level of excitement in the community for improving the community, tackling its most challenging issues in a very transparent way. Milwaukee Succeeds. ThriveOn Collaboration. A commitment to equity and inclusion. None of that was baked into the business plan when Ellen came on board. Because of her vision and her willingness to help create a canvas for a much more productive and engaged community in philanthropy, she created a culture that will live far beyond her tenure.



Dr. John Raymond

*President/CEO of the Medical College
of Wisconsin, a ThriveOn Collaboration
co-founder*

Without Ellen's leadership, I don't think ThriveOn would have happened. It would have been comfortable to continue investing in small initiatives throughout the community, but Ellen chose to have the Foundation invest in moving the needle in very visible and sometimes challenging ways. She highlighted the importance of listening and not rushing to come in and say these are the things we'll do. Even though MCW's research strength is on the determinants of health, we didn't have deep roots in the community tied to economic and other social determinants. They were important limitations that the Foundation was able to help us deal with. We could have built a building on our own. She convinced us it would make more sense to partner with a developer from the community.

Her humble leadership, her approachability, the way she shows respect to partners and investors and the community in many ways is unprecedented. Ellen has left a profound impact on the community and me personally.



Deborah Ellwood

*Maine Community Foundation
president/CEO; former president of
CFLeads, an organization that helps
community foundations build capacity
to lead change*

As CFLeads board chair (from 2018-2021), Ellen was an exceptional partner for me as president and CEO as we strategized how to bring in additional resources, how to encourage the participation of community foundations of all different sizes and how to embrace cutting-edge conversations and national partners. She brought an openness to new ideas and a real interest in engaging, learning and doing what she could to not only build and strengthen the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, but build and strengthen the whole field so community foundations could add value whenever possible.



TIVES



Greg Oberland

Foundation donor; Board member since 2019, Impact Investing Committee member

Ellen has led and positioned the Foundation to move in a different direction than it has historically headed in – the combination of a trusted bank but also a community leader. That is critically needed because of the significant issues the community faces. These are big issues not to be solved in two to five years. You can see that drive inside of her to make sure the Foundation doesn't get misguided in any way.

She is a very strong, strategic thinker, and I've seen her really keep the Board's focus on our strategic direction – especially our North Star of racial equity and inclusion. That's been very powerful. She is very good at building constituencies and thinking about how the Foundation can interact with other parties where each is doing something to drive an issue or initiative forward. She planted the seeds, and we are seeing fruits of the efforts starting to grow.



Isaiah Oliver

President, The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida

She has a wealth of knowledge, experience and perspective and is still an active listener with a learning and listening posture. She knows very well when she is the strongest person in the room, but she doesn't use it to control the room. Those skills create room for leaders to be leaders.

This reality we are living with in 2024 is a very different time because of our experience from 2020 to 2022. To manage a team out of the COVID experience back to in-person engagement says a lot about Ellen. She stayed through the toughest times and has been a resource. Leadership roles can be lonely – to connect with a leader who was open to sharing thoughts and hearing mine was amazing.



Dan Bader

President/CEO of Bader Philanthropies

Her commitment to racial equity and inclusion and her undaunting effort to continue to move that forward despite tension, resistance and criticism has been inspiring. The Foundation has taken that further than any philanthropic foundation in Milwaukee. Her leadership has changed what the Foundation does. It is taking on things that are hard to take on – such as education or race. It has moved from just being a funding entity to being a change agent.

GREATER TOGETHER

THE CAMPAIGN TO BUILD A MILWAUKEE FOR ALL

Historic campaign unites community in philanthropy

Through our Greater Together Campaign, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation welcomed all people and communities throughout the region to see themselves in philanthropy.

More than 4,800 donors accepted our invitation over the past seven years, contributing to the Foundation through a one-time gift, by creating a charitable fund or by making a legacy promise. In all, the campaign raised \$726.8 million.

Every donor has a unique viewpoint and experience, including the seven area philanthropists who recently shared their perspectives for this story. While everyone has a different motivation for giving, they all chose the Foundation as their partner to help drive toward a collective goal of creating a brighter future for everyone in the region.



CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

First campaign for the Foundation, first of its kind nationally

Total raised

\$726.8 million

Total raised for strategic priority areas

More
than

\$35.6 million

New donors to the foundation

3,000

Contributions ranged from

\$5.00 to \$20 million

Original goal:

\$400 million

Revised goal:

\$700 million



Naryan Leazer

Investment adviser creates legacy fund to help drive long-lasting community change

When Naryan Leazer believes in something – whether a person, program or an organization – he invests in it.

As an investment adviser by trade, he knows the power such a contribution can have over time.

“Whether a significant amount or a small amount, I think if I believe in this, what is the best way of believing in it than to give financially,” said Leazer, who works at North Star Resource Group, a wealth management firm.

Over the past 15 years, he has invested his time, talent and ties in the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. In 2023, he invested his treasure by making a legacy promise through the Foundation’s Greater Together Campaign. He named the Foundation as a beneficiary in his estate plan. His legacy fund – the Kylie and Zoe Scholle-Malone Fund – will be half unrestricted and half field of interest, aimed at supporting Black-serving and Black-led nonprofits in the Milwaukee area. It is named after his granddaughters.

Leazer’s relationship with the Foundation has deepened organically over time. It started with its Youth in Service Fund, which spun off to become a separate nonprofit in 2009 called Lead2Change. Leazer was its first board chair. He later served on grant review committees for the Community Connections Small Grants Program and Reasons for Hope MKE Fund. The small grants program, co-



Naryan Leazer served on the Reasons for Hope MKE Fund grant review committee. The fund was created following the civic unrest in Sherman Park in 2016.

created by the Foundation and partners in 2014, provides grants of up to \$600 to support resident-led efforts to improve the quality of life in local neighborhoods. Reasons for Hope provides grants of up to \$10,000 to projects that promote peace and build community cohesion.

“Milwaukee will look vastly different 5, 10, 15 years from now. Just knowing that I’m part of that work that drove that change, and that I had an opportunity to participate, is exciting. For me, it is just knowing that this idea of leaving the community better than when you were here or trying to have an impact even while we’re gone.”

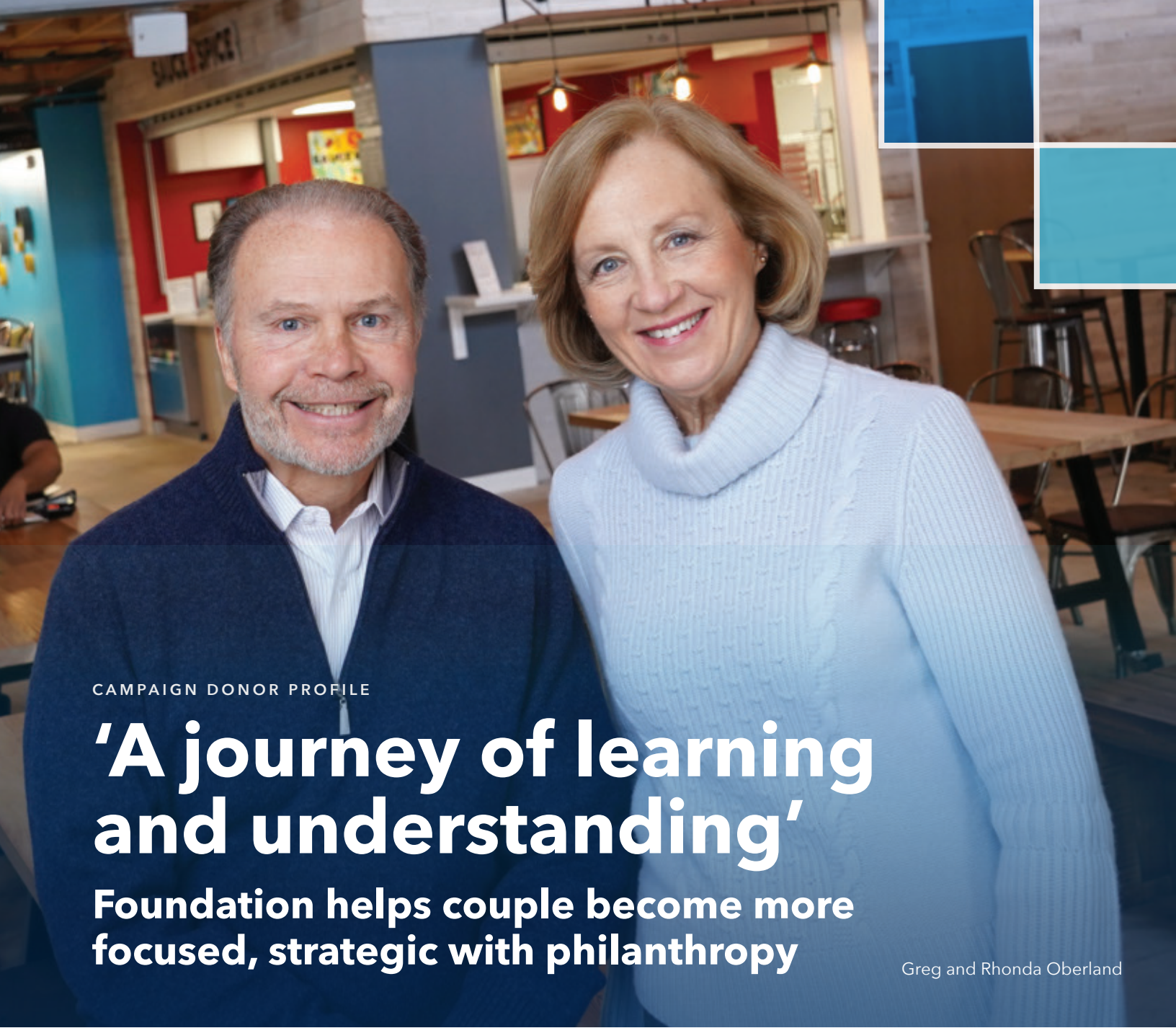
~ Naryan Leazer, Foundation donor and board member

As both a community member and through his time spent on the various grant committees, Leazer has witnessed the Foundation’s shift toward centering more community voice within its work. He says his involvement in such resident-led programs stems from wanting to create spaces where the community’s voice could be heard.

“If I was at the table, I could represent people or bring others to the table,” said Leazer, who joined the Foundation’s Community Impact Committee in 2018 as its first community representative and was appointed to the Foundation Board in 2021.

What motivated Leazer the most about contributing to the campaign is imagining the impact it can have in the community over time.

“Milwaukee will look vastly different 5, 10, 15 years from now,” Leazer said. “Just knowing that I’m part of that work that drove that change, and that I had an opportunity to participate, is exciting. For me, it is just knowing that this idea of leaving the community better than when you were here or trying to have an impact even while we’re gone.”



CAMPAIGN DONOR PROFILE

'A journey of learning and understanding'

Foundation helps couple become more focused, strategic with philanthropy

Greg and Rhonda Oberland

Greg Oberland and his wife, Rhonda, started their donor advised fund in 2018 shortly after he retired from Northwestern Mutual as its president.

While the couple had lived in the area for more than three decades at that point, they wanted to have a deeper connection to the community. They knew that the Greater Milwaukee Foundation could help make that happen, given its extensive knowledge of and commitment to the region over the past century.

Greg points to his experience as a donor, and his role as a Foundation Board member since 2019, as taking him on a journey of learning and understanding.

"It has deepened my understanding of issues and exposed me to new ways of thinking about things," Oberland said. "If we didn't have a partnership with the Foundation, I don't think my wife and I would have as strong a focus or ultimately have as big an impact with our philanthropic dollars as we are having."

Oberland said their relationship with the Foundation has made them much more committed to doing whatever they can to help advance racial equity and inclusion in Milwaukee. They showed that commitment firsthand by making several contributions to the Greater Together Campaign's ThriveOn Collaboration priority area. They contributed to the redevelopment of the historic Gimbels-Schuster's building into ThriveOn King, supported the artwork that will be installed within the first-floor community spaces and gave a gift to support Malaika Early Learning Center, the 5-star child care provider and one of ThriveOn King's anchor tenants.

Oberland said they felt a strong sense of pride to support such an effort through the Foundation's historic campaign, noting that its overall vision inspired them to give.

"There was a line used early on about how 'A Milwaukee for all would require all of Milwaukee,'" Oberland said. "I thought that was so spot on. As we are driving toward racial equity and trying to eliminate wealth disparities that exist in this community and want everyone to have that opportunity to enjoy the benefits – it requires everybody to be involved."



The Oberlands made a grant from their fund to support artwork by more than 20 local artists, including La Familia de Arte, which will be featured on the first floor of ThriveOn King. The grassroots art group is making ceramic planters depicting historical events and artistic contributions related to Bronzeville.



“This endowment changes people’s lives. It changes the stories we hear. It changes the world.”

~ Helen Ambuel, Foundation donor

(Left to right) Current Erin Von Fellow Nayda Kelly; Faithe Colas, Von’s widow; donor Helen Ambuel; and inaugural Von Fellow Teran Powell.

HONORING A RADIO LEGEND

Endowment fund paves the way for journalists of color, amplifying diverse voices in MKE and beyond

Over the course of his 25-year radio career in Milwaukee, Eric Von became widely known as a trusted voice of the Black community.



Eric Von

“Eric believed that if people were informed, they would do better,” said his widow, Faithe Colas, president of Von Communications. “They would make better decisions about their lives, about the city.”

That is a passion Helen Ambuel shared with Von, though the two never met. Through a gift she made to the Foundation in 2023, Ambuel is honoring Von’s legacy and helping support the next generation of journalists of color.

The Eric Von Broadcast Fellowship Endowment Fund that Ambuel started supports the Eric Von Broadcast Fellowship, which was created at WUWM in 2017 and is designed to address the underrepresentation of people of color in broadcast journalism. Before his death in 2016, Von had worked on “Precious Lives,” a two-year project with WUWM about gun violence and young people in Milwaukee.

The yearlong fellowship employs college graduates of color interested in broadcast journalism. Fellows contribute content to WUWM’s radio and digital platforms. The paid position includes salary, benefits and mentoring from other WUWM staff.

Ambuel got to know Colas as a member of WUWM’s advisory board. Ambuel joined in 2015 and Colas joined three years later. It was at a meet-and-greet event at Colas’ house, which introduced prospective donors to the fifth Von Fellow, when Colas suggested the idea for an endowment. The concept resonated with Ambuel, who, as a WUWM listener, got to know Von through his work on “Precious Lives.”

“I want to support good journalism and accurate information,” Ambuel said. “NPR represents that. I felt like a public radio station needs to reflect the community; it needs to represent the community, and it needs to be the community.”

The timing was fortuitous. Ambuel was on the board of a family foundation that was dividing. Some assets were going to create a donor advised fund that would be advised by her and her cousins, leaving her resources to invest in community.

For Colas, there was no other option but the Foundation to house the fund. She had worked for a Foundation grantee, partnered with the Foundation on the ThriveOn Collaboration, served on its Marketing and Communications Committee and had given to several charitable funds over the years. The Foundation also supported the fellowship in 2022. The program, which seeks to bring a diversity of perspectives and stories to the air, aligns with the Foundation’s values of racial equity and inclusion.

“I know the impact that the Foundation has in the community,” she said. “It has been consistent in its message of helping people of all walks of life. That resonates a lot with me.”

The stories covered through the fellowship have reflected the entire community, Colas said. Topics have ranged from youth homelessness in Milwaukee to the impact of the state’s Latino community to how a national caregiver shortage is affecting LGBTQ+ older adults.

To date, the fellowship has launched the careers of five fellows. But the two women have their sights set on something much larger – to have a similar fellowship at every public radio station.

“This endowment changes people’s lives,” Helen said. “It changes the stories we hear. It changes the world.”



Dave and Marge Hamacher

CAMPAIGN DONOR PROFILE

COUPLE'S PHILANTHROPIC LEGACY EVOLVES

through 30-year partnership with Foundation

When Dave and Marge Hamacher were making their foray into philanthropy, they were encouraged by their accountant at the time to consider the Greater Milwaukee Foundation as a resource. The Madison natives had lived in the Milwaukee area for 20-plus years at that point and were looking to invest more in the place they called home but needed assistance.

"For me to manage my own foundation among the other things I was doing didn't make a whole lot of sense," said Dave, who had run a successful pharmacy consulting company, Hamacher and Associates, for 20 years before selling and retiring in 2000. "We wanted

somebody local. The Foundation had the pulse of what was going on in Milwaukee. It understood where the needs were."

Now, as they enter the next chapter of their philanthropic journey – considering what happens to their fund once they pass – they have once again leaned on the Foundation for help. In 2023, 32 years after starting their donor advised fund, they added the Foundation as a beneficiary in their will. They also named their four children as successor advisers to their legacy fund, the David P. and Marjorie L. Hamacher Family Fund.

"I've never doubted our early decisions to involve the Foundation," said Dave, 81. "The administration has been good, the investments have been excellent, and we've been able to do what we've wanted to do in giving."

The Hamachers met in high school and dated while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dave graduated from the UW-Madison School of Pharmacy and soon began working at Stein Drug, which grew to become a 19-store regional pharmacy chain that was later sold to Walgreens in 1979. Dave was a partner and executive vice president.

"I've never doubted our early decisions to involve the Foundation. The administration has been good, the investments have been excellent, and we've been able to do what we've wanted to do in giving."

~ Foundation donor, Dave Hamacher

The couple, who settled in Elm Grove, have long been involved in the community, especially in their Catholic church, where they served as cantors and readers, led Bible studies and worked the Lenten Friday night fish fry. But they pointed to Dave's business partner, Marty Stein, as an inspiration for further community involvement.

"Marty was involved in so many charities and so many things, so he kind of helped us get directed," said Marge, 78, who worked in public relations, special events and human resources over the years at Hamacher and Associates.

While they spend a portion of the year in Bonita Springs, Florida, the couple feels compelled to direct their philanthropic dollars to support organizations in the Milwaukee area, where they believe there is a greater need.

"Every time we've asked for the Foundation's help, they've been there," Dave said.

The Hamachers' fund has grown six-fold over the decades. It has supported nonprofits such as Hunger Task Force; St. Ann



Through their relationship with the Foundation over the past 30 years, the Hamachers have been introduced to many community nonprofits, such as Malaika Early Learning Center.

Center for Intergenerational Care, where Dave once served on the Board and two grandchildren attended child care; and Children's Wisconsin, where their second oldest child was treated for a heart condition at six weeks old.

The Foundation has exposed them to organizations doing good work in their areas of interest – food security, early childhood education and mental health. It has invited the couple on site visits to local nonprofits, such as Malaika Early Learning Center, and made them aware of urgent funding needs, such as when an area community meal program was in dire need of a new dishwasher to keep up with the 400 meals it serves daily.

"I think it's a wonderful opportunity for any family, couple or individual to be able to utilize in giving in Milwaukee," Dave said.



"I believe that giving, not receiving, is the most joyful experience we can have in this life. The right to make a difference through our choices and actions, with whatever little we have, is fundamental to our dignity."

~ Rachel Monaco, Foundation donor

FROM GRANTEE TO GRANTMAKER

Donor deepens connection with Foundation, honors husband's memory

Rachel Monaco has held many different titles over the course of her career – attorney, professor, nonprofit executive, artist – but they all share the same goal: empowerment.

“I love listening to people and identifying ways to make them shine,” said Monaco, who began her legal career in 2004 and has had a solo practice in trust and estates since 2009.

In estate planning, Monaco helps people feel good about the legacy they want to leave behind.

“I believe that giving, not receiving, is the most joyful experience we can have in this life,” she said. “The right to make a difference through our choices and actions, with whatever little we have, is fundamental to our dignity. Put another way, deciding one has the power to give is empowering in its own right.”

Philanthropy often works its way into the conversations that Monaco has with clients and, over the years, so too has the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. In 2023, she turned to the Foundation for her own philanthropy when she created the Wyldfire Foundation Fund, a donor advised fund in memory of her late husband, Corey Wilcox, who died in 2022 from pancreatic cancer.

“I practice what I preach,” said Monaco, who also included the Foundation as a beneficiary in her estate plan. “The Foundation, to me, provides a lot of accessibility to the conversation about

philanthropy and making a difference. Here is an organization that offers some real structure and support for people who might just be dabbling in the idea of philanthropy.”

Her relationship with the Foundation has taken on multiple layers over the years, having started first as a grant recipient. Monaco is the founder and former executive director of Lotus Legal Clinic, a Milwaukee-based legal clinic for victims of human trafficking and sexual assault. She served as an assistant professor and chair of the justice department for nearly six years at Mount Mary University and was an adjunct professor in its art therapy doctoral program. She is a guest teacher for art therapy departments upon request, including Syracuse University.

In 2017, she became a member of the Foundation's Herbert J. Mueller Society, a membership society for professional advisers.

Over the years, Monaco said she has appreciated the opportunities the Foundation has given her to learn and be in conversation with other professional advisers. She also valued the Foundation's partnership in helping create the fund that honors her late husband.

Each spring, the Mighty Oak Memorial Run is held in Wilcox's memory, and contributions go directly into the fund, which supports conservation, artistic



Supporting conservation is among the many interest areas of the Wyldfire Foundation Fund, which Rachel Monaco created in honor of her late husband, Corey.

creativity and art therapy, animal welfare, education and social justice, all areas the couple felt passionately about. The focus for 2024's run was the Kettle Moraine State Forest Alliance, a nonprofit supporting the Ice Age Trail.

“I found the Foundation's flexibility and willingness to work with me on that to be tremendous,” Monaco said. “It gives me a lot of meaning and purpose to take something horrible and turn it into something that can have a tangible, positive impact on the world. I want to be an inspiration for others to understand that it is very accessible, and they can do this too.”

‘The mother of Oconomowoc’

Maribeth Bush helped nourish a culture of philanthropy through decades of service to OAF

Not many of us have a day proclaimed in our honor, but count Maribeth Bush among the few people in Waukesha County who do. On Dec. 8, 2023, the city of Oconomowoc proclaimed “Maribeth Bush Day” and presented her with the Key to the City. The celebration honored Bush upon her retirement from the Oconomowoc Area Foundation, after having served in many roles since the foundation’s inception in 2002.

Bush has been a founding and continuing board member, board president and foundation coordinator, a position she held for the past 10 years. Bush is honored by the award but said her work has been all about the mission: “We all want the best for our community.”

OAF also created the Maribeth Bush Humanitarian Award both to celebrate her and inspire others.

“Maribeth served the OAF and Oconomowoc with her whole heart and soul for over 20 years,” said Bob Johnson, OAF board chair. “This award will keep that spirit of exemplary service to others alive for generations to come.”

The OAF, a partner foundation of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, started with a fund created by Oconomowoc hardware store owner and philanthropist Hilbert N. Scherffius. Civic leaders and committed volunteers – initially IT businessman Craig Schiefelbein and former Navy vice admiral Dirk

Debbink – realized the potential of building on this base to provide lasting support for local charitable causes.

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY

Bush, who has an administrative and marketing background, moved to Oconomowoc in 1990 with her late husband, Jerry, raising their sons Rob and Jim on their hobby farm. When the boys were young, she began working as a kindergarten teacher’s aide at Meadow View Elementary, then as a substitute teacher’s aide for special needs students at Park Lawn Elementary, both in Oconomowoc.

“It was truly one of the most impactful things I could have done in my life,” she recalled. “I learned a lot about the schools and a lot about the parents and students.”



The Oconomowoc Area Foundation has awarded \$4.7 million over the years to support projects in the community, such as John and Lavinia Rockwell Park.



Maribeth Bush, former coordinator of the Oconomowoc Area Foundation, at her favorite place, the downtown boardwalk along Fowler Lake in Oconomowoc.

She met Schiefelbein, then CEO of the IT company Paragon Development Systems, on a blue-ribbon task force to improve the facilities within the Oconomowoc schools.

“On that task force, I saw her work ethic and attention to detail, and offered her a job on the spot as my executive assistant,” Schiefelbein recalled. Bush began to volunteer with OAF as well.

Over the years, Bush has also volunteered with many other community groups, including the Oconomowoc Public Education Foundation and Oconomowoc Rotary Club and Rotary Foundation.

IMPACT ON MANY LEVELS

Over the years, OAF has awarded \$4.7 million to more than 125 area nonprofit organizations – which has had a huge impact in a small geographic area. Its five funding priorities have not changed: caring for children, families, and the elderly; developing youth; helping those in need, preserving the environment; and enriching the community through the arts and cultural programming. What has changed are the needs, including food insecurity, the mental health needs of youth and COVID.

“We have to help big needs,” she said, “But smaller projects that improve the quality of life are important as

“She didn’t build the nonprofits we fund, but she helped create a culture that helped make them better.”

~ Craig Schiefelbein, OAF donor

well.” Hence OAF’s funding of a skate park, splash pad and the Moonlit Movies series in Fowler Park.

One of the “big needs” funding recipients is the Lake Area Free Clinic. Serving low-income residents of Waukesha County with medical and dental services, the clinic has been continuously sponsored by OAF since its inception.

“They don’t just fund new projects,” said Megan Welsh, LAFC’s marketing and development director. “They hold the building blocks in place to keep the culture of the community intact.”

Welsh said of Bush, “If Oconomowoc had a community crockpot, Maribeth would be filling it. She is the mother of Oconomowoc.”

Schiefelbein added, “She didn’t build the nonprofits we fund, but she helped create a culture that helped make them better.”

Through the Foundation-supported Empowerment Fund, the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Southeastern Wisconsin is helping local Latino entrepreneurs grow their businesses.



FOUNDATION LENDS SUPPORT TO **Latino Chamber to launch Empowerment Fund**

Through philanthropic investment, an organization based on Milwaukee's south side is expanding its ability to provide financial capital to small businesses. The Latino Chamber of Commerce of Southeastern Wisconsin, with support from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, recently launched the Empowerment Fund to help local businesses grow and thrive while avoiding the risk of predatory lending practices.

"This is a unique project for us as part of our mission is to ensure entrepreneurs can access competitively priced capital," said Nelson Soler, president of the Latino Chamber of Southeastern Wisconsin.

Since it began its alternative lending program, the chamber has provided more than \$2.1 million in loans and grants

to businesses across southeastern Wisconsin, with a focus on Latino-owned businesses. Through advocacy, education and support, the chamber empowers Latino and emerging entrepreneurs with an overarching goal of strengthening the region's economic vitality.

The Foundation is the Empowerment Fund's lead funder. This work is a part of the Foundation's overall impact investing strategy, which supports businesses, developments, projects and entrepreneurs with loans that are recycled back into the community as dollars are returned.

"The investment aligns with our equitable economic opportunity strategy to provide access to local businesses that are having a tough time receiving capital on the traditional path," Kermiath McClendon, the Foundation's impact investing manager, said. "It will also help us drive more capital investments in the south side neighbors and in the Hispanic community."

HOW IT WORKS

The goal is to help entrepreneurs avoid predatory lenders who offer quick access to capital to businesses with high-interest rates and fees. These practices often target businesses with limited or no funding with little regard for a business's long-term health.

"We understand the significant challenges that predatory lending poses to small businesses, especially within the Latino community," Soler said. "The Empowerment Fund is a crucial step in leveling the playing field and ensuring that our local entrepreneurs have the opportunity to succeed." Eligible businesses will be able to seek loans between \$5,000 and \$25,000. In addition to financial assistance, borrowers will receive financial coaching and educational workshops, support in restructuring existing debt and improving credit scores, and networking opportunities.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES, STRENGTHENING MILWAUKEE

The Foundation is committed to strengthening its relationship with Milwaukee's south side and Latino/a communities through investment and partnership. Since 2020 alone, the Foundation has awarded nearly \$20 million in grants to nonprofits based in greater south side neighborhoods, including more than \$11 million in the near south side. Supporting the Empowerment Fund adds a new dimension through investment in the for-profit sector.



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"The Empowerment Fund is a crucial step in leveling the playing field and ensuring that our local entrepreneurs have the opportunity to succeed."

~ Nelson Soler, president of the Latino Chamber of Southeastern Wisconsin

Civic and community leaders from the south side have expressed the desire for the Foundation to deepen its commitments, according to Ian Bautista, Foundation senior director of civic engagement.

"This fund represents an opportunity for the Foundation to take a step in that direction in response to the great opportunities for growing Milwaukee's economy by harnessing the energy and hard work of small businesses on the south side and elsewhere led by Latino/a entrepreneurs," he said.

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