





A WORD FROM YOUR COMMUNITY FOUNDAITON

As we close out our 2025 fiscal year, we are filled with gratitude for the support and trust of our board members, donors, and community partners. Your commitment makes it possible for the Branch County Community Foundation (BCCF) to continue its mission of strengthening our communities today and for generations to come. This year marked an important milestone for BCCF. Our Board of Directors experienced a significant transition and came together to establish four guiding priorities that will shape our work over the next four years. These priorities reflect our shared vision of building a healthier, more vibrant, and more connected community. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to fund a wide range of projects, from enhancing community spaces that encourage physical activity and connection, to supporting our youngest learners as they develop toward bright futures. Each initiative demonstrates the power of collaboration and the lasting impact that is possible when we work together.

Within this report, you will find a selection of stories that highlight the progress and possibilities your support has made real. We hope you find them as inspiring as we do, and that they remind you of the difference we can achieve together.

On behalf of the Board and staff of the Branch County Community Foundation, thank you for being a vital part of our work and our community's future.

DON GERMANN

BOARD CHAIR

ERICA HEMINGER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

230

Generous donors helped their communities through contributions to funds that support education, child welfare, homelessness, arts and culture, and more.

47

Local nonprofit organizations working to meet the needs of Branch County and Colon's communities were supported through our grant programs.

\$388k

In grants and scholarships awarded to help build a better Branch County and Colon.





Community Priorities

This year, the Branch County Community Foundation's Board of Directors took a significant step in shaping the future of our work. After thoughtful discussion and community input, the Board identified four priority areas that will guide our efforts over the next four years. These priorities will not only inform our unrestricted grantmaking, but also align our community leadership initiatives and sponsorship efforts to meet the most pressing needs in Branch County.

Enhancing Youth Mental Health Supports – ensuring young people have the resources and networks they need to thrive.

Accelerating Workforce Development – strengthening opportunities that prepare residents for meaningful careers and economic stability.

Supporting English Learners – building programs that break down barriers and help all community members succeed.

Improving Access to Childcare – creating solutions that help families balance work and life while giving children the best start.

By identifying these focus areas, the Board has set a clear vision for the Foundation's role in building a stronger, healthier, and more resilient community. This intentional focus allows us to be a catalyst for change, ensuring that every grant we award, every partnership we nurture, and every investment we make has a lasting impact.





Growing Bright Futures

At the Community Foundation, we believe that investing in children builds the foundation for a stronger community. Two upcoming grant-funded projects are poised to make a meaningful difference for Branch County's youngest learners by addressing both their developmental and basic needs.

Music Therapy for Early Learners

Branch Intermediate School District Early Education Services has launched a music therapy program for children ages 2-5, with funding from the Branch County Community Foundation. Led by a Board-Certified Music Therapist, the program will integrate singing, movement, and instrument play into classroom learning. Research shows music therapy strengthens language skills, supports emotional regulation, and improves memory, directly enhancing school readiness.

With grant support, approximately 150 students will benefit from sessions, helping them build confidence and social-emotional skills at a crucial stage of development.

Weekend Food Support for Head Start Students

Branch County Head Start is working to provide non-perishable food to Head Start students experiencing homelessness. The project will supply weekend meals and snacks for about 26 students throughout the school year, easing the stress families face from rising food costs and unstable housing. By ensuring children's basic nutritional needs are met, this program helps students return to school on Monday ready to learn. Together, these projects reflect BCCF's commitment to meeting immediate needs while investing in long-term growth. From nourishing bodies to nurturing minds, these grants demonstrate the power of community support in giving every child the chance to thrive.

“OUR BIGGEST HOPE FOR THIS (WEEKEND FOOD SUPPORT) PROJECT IS THAT THE IDENTIFIED CHILDREN DO NOT COME TO SCHOOL HUNGRY. THIS INCREASES THEIR CAPACITY TO LEARN AND GROW. WITH CONSISTENT ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL FOOD RESOURCES, FAMILIES WILL HAVE THE ABILITY TO BE MORE ENGAGED IN THEIR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION AND IMPROVE OVERALL STUDENT ATTENDANCE.”

CHANITY BROUSE
BRANCH ISD EARLY EDUCATION

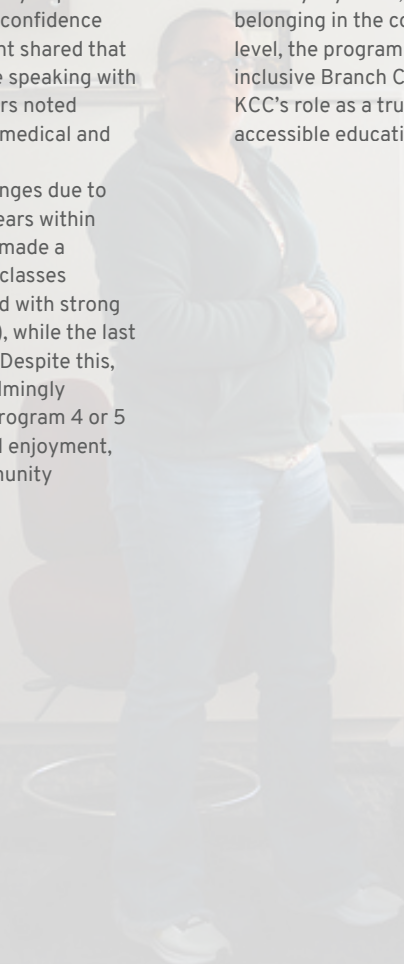


Connecting Through Communication

The Conversational English for Community Living program was created to support English Language Learners in Branch County who already had a foundational understanding of English. The goal was to strengthen communication skills needed to navigate daily life, from healthcare appointments to school interactions and financial transactions. Instruction was built around real-world scenarios, and classes emphasized an immersive approach. This not only improved language fluency but also built confidence among participants. One student shared that they now felt more comfortable speaking with their child's teacher, while others noted greater confidence in handling medical and financial conversations.

While the program faced challenges due to shifting political climates and fears within immigrant communities, it still made a meaningful impact. Of the four classes originally planned, two launched with strong enrollment (15 and 13 students), while the last two saw reduced participation. Despite this, student feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with most rating the program 4 or 5 out of 5 in areas such as overall enjoyment, clarity, and confidence in community engagement.

Thanks to the partnership between the Community Foundation and Kellogg Community College (KCC), the grant not only supported class instruction but also funded curriculum development, outreach, instructional staff, and materials. The program has laid a foundation for future sessions, with another class planned for the Fall. The impact is already clear: students are reporting greater confidence, reduced barriers to everyday tasks, and a stronger sense of belonging in the community. At a broader level, the program is helping build a more inclusive Branch County while reinforcing KCC's role as a trusted provider of lifelong, accessible education.





Responding with Relief, Rebuilding with Hope

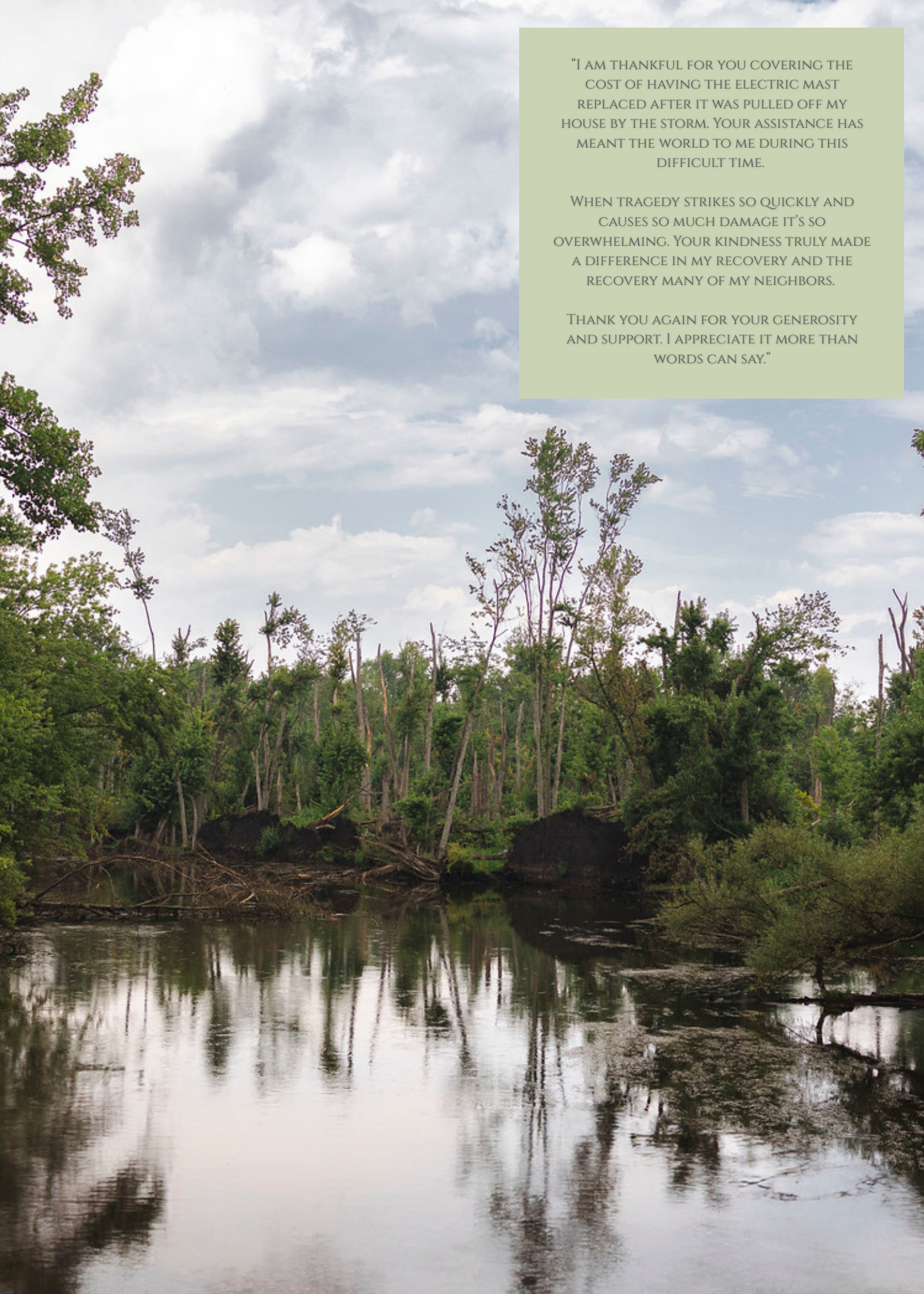
In May 2024, severe tornadoes swept through Sherwood and Colon, leaving families without homes, cars, clothing, and basic necessities. In the aftermath, the United Way of Branch County stepped in to provide immediate relief, coordinating donations, organizing volunteers, and ensuring essential needs were met.

A key partner in this effort has been longtime Union City volunteer, Donna Claar, who quickly became the community's point person for collecting, sorting, and distributing donations. Since the day after the storm, she has tirelessly worked alongside United Way staff to ensure families receive support, from food and gas cards to clothing and school supplies, helping them take steps toward rebuilding their lives.

With grant support from the Branch County Community Foundation, United Way has been able to provide direct temporary assistance to families in crisis. All requests are carefully evaluated, and funds are distributed through essentials like grocery, gas, and retail cards, ensuring that resources go exactly where they are needed most. While this aid cannot solve the larger challenges of housing loss or delayed insurance and FEMA relief, it has made an immediate impact by helping families access food, transportation, and other daily necessities.

This project reflects the heart of community giving: stepping up in times of crisis. By filling urgent gaps and standing beside families as they navigate the long road to recovery, the Branch County Community Foundation and the United Way of Branch County are ensuring that no one faces disaster alone.





"I AM THANKFUL FOR YOU COVERING THE
COST OF HAVING THE ELECTRIC MAST
REPLACED AFTER IT WAS PULLED OFF MY
HOUSE BY THE STORM. YOUR ASSISTANCE HAS
MEANT THE WORLD TO ME DURING THIS
DIFFICULT TIME.

WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES SO QUICKLY AND
CAUSES SO MUCH DAMAGE IT'S SO
OVERWHELMING. YOUR KINDNESS TRULY MADE
A DIFFERENCE IN MY RECOVERY AND THE
RECOVERY MANY OF MY NEIGHBORS.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR GENEROSITY
AND SUPPORT. I APPRECIATE IT MORE THAN
WORDS CAN SAY."

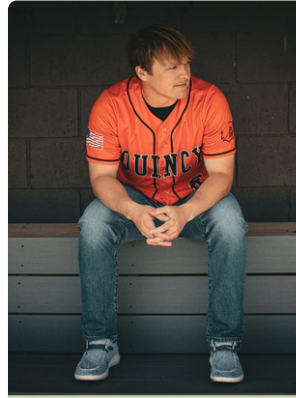


Creating Community Assets

When the Colon Community Park Board began discussing additions to the park, one request quickly rose to the top: Pickleball. Thanks to strong community support and generous grant funding, that vision became reality in 2025. Once funding was secured, the Board moved quickly, securing quotes and scheduling construction. In just three weeks, the new court was completed, with final touches added shortly after. The community celebrated with a Grand Opening on May 24, 2025, featuring a Pickleball instructor who introduced the game to residents. Those who attended learned the rules, tried out the sport, and expressed their excitement for the new addition. Soon after opening, the Park Board recognized that the adjoining basketball court created some overlap with Pickleball play.

In partnership with the Village, ARPA funds originally set aside for minor repairs were reallocated to build a dedicated basketball pad. This ensured both sports could be enjoyed without interference. Since then, the Pickleball court has seen daily use, with residents of all ages joining in. One local league player even volunteered to lead free lessons on Monday evenings, a response that has been met with enthusiasm from the community.

This project was made possible through a combination of community donations and grant funding from Branch County Community Foundation Funds including the Colon Foundation Fund, Healthy Seniors Fund, and Healthy Youth Fund.



Investing In Our Students

The Community Foundation's scholarship program is unique in its deep roots of personal connection. The majority of our scholarships are established in memory or in honor of someone, a loved one, a mentor, a community member, whose legacy now lives on through opportunity. These scholarships were created by families and individuals who believe, as we do, that education is power, and that every student deserves the chance to chase their goals and have assistance financially, regardless of background or pathway.

Whether a student is working toward a skilled trade or vocational certificate, a 2-year associate degree, or a 4-year bachelor's degree, our scholarships are designed to support them on their unique educational journey. This year BCCF *doubled* our scholarship awards. We awarded a total of \$107,000 in scholarships, an incredible investment in the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and change makers. We are also proud to share that 15% of this year's awards were granted to students who are already enrolled in accredited institutions, highlighting our ongoing commitment to supporting students not just at the start, but all the way through to completion.

Driving Community Literacy **Forward**

When the Branch District Library prepared to launch its new bookmobile, one important piece was still missing: books to fill the shelves. Thanks to the grant funding from the Branch County Community Foundation and additional support from local community organizations, that need was met in full. With the funds, Branch District Library was able to purchase an entirely new collection to stock the bookmobile from top to bottom. Since its launch in early May, the bookmobile has been on the move, making scheduled stops at familiar community locations while also adding new ones along the way. Each stop has brought new faces, new connections, and more opportunities for library access.

The bookmobile has also been a welcome presence at local events, where library staff have signed up new cardholders and sent countless books and materials home with both long-term patrons and first-time users. The bookmobile represents more than just a new vehicle, it is a rolling resource center that helps ensure access to information, literacy, and learning for residents across the county. With fully stocked shelves and a growing route, the bookmobile is already proving to be an invaluable community asset.







Making Childcare Work For All

The Branch County Community Foundation's Childcare Implementation Team is working with Region 8 partners across Southwest Michigan to strengthen the childcare system. Supported by grants from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, local coalitions are addressing some of the toughest challenges in childcare: workforce shortages, limited access to affordable care, and the need for stronger engagement with both families and employers. Branch County's priorities include:

- Building a sustainable early childhood workforce by creating a pipeline of trained providers and educators.
- Supporting and retaining current providers so they can continue offering reliable care to local families.
- Expanding quality, affordable childcare options across the county to reduce childcare deserts.
- Engaging cross-sector partners and employers to strengthen collaboration and investment in childcare solutions.

- Increasing participation in the MI Tri-Share program, which helps families, employers, and the state share the cost of care.

These efforts align with the Region 8 Roadmap to childcare, a comprehensive plan that has already seen measurable progress on several key recommendations. Locally, the Branch ISD, Great Start Collaborative, Insight Hospital, the City of Coldwater, Child Care Network, and other partners are working side by side with BCCF to move this work forward.

While challenges remain (childcare deserts, staffing shortages, and the rising cost of care) local and regional progress is underway.

Together, our community is not only responding to urgent needs but also tackling the root causes of our childcare landscape. This collective effort is creating the conditions necessary for long-term, systemic change, ensuring that Branch County's families, providers, and employers have the support they need to thrive.

A child's hand is shown playing with a wooden abacus on a shaggy rug. The abacus has several wooden rods with colorful beads (yellow, grey, red, white) sliding along them. The child is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

Regionally, there is child care capacity for only 56% of the population aged 0-5.

In Branch County specifically, there are 3.3 children waiting for one available spot at a licensed childcare provider.

“MY FAMILY INCOME IS NOT ENOUGH TO SUPPORT THE DAILY EXPENSES OF THE FAMILY AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDCARE.” - BRANCH COUNTY PARENT

A Bright Future for **Philanthropy**

As the 2024–2025 program year wrapped up, the Community Foundation’s Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is proud to celebrate a year of leadership, service, and community impact.

- YAC members attended the statewide CMF Summer Conference at Central Michigan University, connecting with peers and exploring philanthropy on a deeper level.
- Over 200 students participated in this year’s needs assessment, identifying mental health, bullying, and substance abuse as top concerns. These priorities guided YAC’s grantmaking.
- In January, YAC awarded \$24,280 to eight local projects, including programs at Branch ISD, Coldwater Band Boosters, and the Branch County Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence.

- YAC members shopped for holiday gifts for 18 local children, assembled hygiene kits with hygiene essentials and snacks for schools to disburse to their students, and shared philanthropy lessons with sixth-grade classrooms. The sixth-grade classes had the chance to choose a local nonprofit to receive unrestricted funding.
- YAC and the BCCF Board enjoyed time together at Chameleon Pottery Studio, supporting a local community partner while building intergenerational connections.

Through these efforts, YAC continues to amplify youth voices and meet real community needs, inspiring the next generation of leaders and changemakers.





"WHAT I ENJOYED MOST WAS BEING ABLE TO
DIRECTLY SUPPORT STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS.
KNOWING THAT SOMETHING SO SIMPLE COULD
MAKE THEIR DAY A LITTLE EASIER. IT WAS A GREAT
REMINDER THAT EVEN SMALL EFFORTS CAN HAVE
A REAL IMPACT."

KAILYNNE SCARE
BRONSON HIGH SCHOOL



Leaving a **Legacy** for Local Agriculture

The Community Foundation is proud to be a place where donors can leave a lasting legacy, guided by their passions and values. For longtime Coldwater farmer Remus Rigg, that passion has always been agriculture. After graduating from Michigan State University in 1954, Remus purchased his present-day farm in 1966, beginning with 367 acres and 100 cows. Over the years, he grew the operation to more than 1,000 acres of crops. His dedication to farming was recognized in 1990 when he was named MSU Dairy Farmer of the Year. Beyond the farm, Remus played a leading role in agricultural organizations locally and state-wide. His service included leadership positions with the Michigan Milk Producers Association, the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, the Branch County Farm Bureau, and many others.

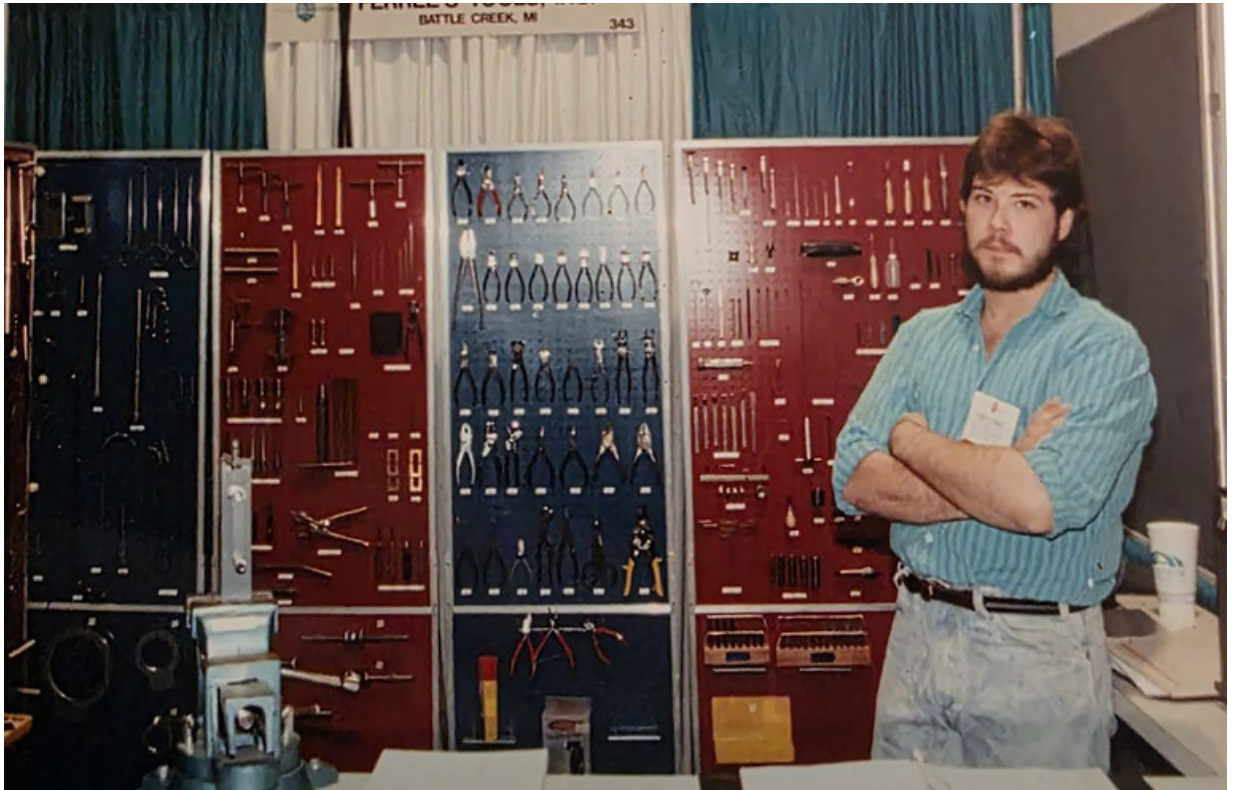
Remus and his late wife, Ruth, worked side by side for decades. Ruth handling payroll and financial records while Remus focused on the field and herd. Today Remus is remarried to Donna McLaughlin and his grandson, Kyle Huff, continues the work on the farm.

Looking to the future, Remus and his family partnered with the Community Foundation to establish the Remus Rigg Agriculture Endowment. This fund will support agricultural needs in Branch County and Colon.

The Community Foundation is honored to work with donors like Remus who choose to leave a legacy that strengthens areas of personal interests and the community they care about most.

“MY HOPE IS
THAT THIS NEW
AGRICULTURE
ENDOWMENT
FUND WILL
ENCOURAGE AND
ASSIST YOUNG
FARMERS TO
PURSUE THEIR
DREAM OF
BECOMING
SUCCESSFUL
FARMERS HERE IN
BRANCH
COUNTY.”





Empowering Students Through A **Legacy**

After the unexpected passing of Curtis Ferree, his family sought a meaningful way to preserve his legacy. Together, they established the Curtis Ferree Memorial Fund in memory of a beloved father, son, and husband whose life was defined by dedication to his craft and family.

Curtis spent more than 20 years as a machinist at Ferree's Tools Inc., where his skill and leadership led him to become shop foreman and eventually Company President. Beyond his career, Curtis was a passionate collector of tools, ranging from antique carpentry pieces to modern precision instruments, reflecting his lifelong love of building and design.

To honor that passion, a portion of his estate was dedicated to supporting local students pursuing careers in machining. Through the Curtis Ferree Memorial Fund, students graduating from the Branch Areas Careers Center's CAD/CAM program with employment secured after graduation will receive a full toolbox of professional-grade tools, giving them the essential resources to begin their careers.

The Community Foundation is honored to help families like the Ferree's create innovative ways to carry forward a legacy, ensuring that passions and values are not only remembered, but continue to inspire and equip the next generation.

“WE WANTED TO SUPPORT THE NEXT
GENERATION OF MANUFACTURING AND TO
COMMEMORATE HIS DEDICATION TO THE
TRADES.” - THE FERREE FAMILY

Family Philanthropy in Action

For the Baker family, philanthropy is like the arts they support: creative, enduring, and meant to inspire others. Morgan Baker, the youngest daughter, has grown up seeing firsthand how generosity can shape a community. For the past four years, she has been an active member of the Youth Advisory Council at the Branch County Community Foundation, where she now serves as Vice-Chair. She also holds a seat on the Community Foundation's Board of Directors, bringing the perspective and energy of young people into important community conversations.

Morgan has not only given her time and leadership, but she has also experienced the Foundation's impact as a recipient. Through the Irma L. English Memorial Fund, she received scholarships to attend Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp and the Blue Lake International Program.

"WENDI'S PASSION WAS THEATER AND MUSIC. UPON HER PASSING, OUR FAMILY WANTED TO ESTABLISH A SCHOLARSHIP TO SUPPORT HER PASSION AND CONTINUE HER LEGACY BY HELPING COLDWATER STUDENTS PURSUE THEIR INTEREST IN THE PERFORMING ARTS. PARTNERING WITH THE BCCF WAS A NATURAL PATH TO ACCOMPLISHING BOTH."

Those experiences fueled her love for the arts and gave her a deeper understanding of what it means to receive support from a caring community.

That balance of giving and receiving is woven throughout the Bakers' story. When Wendi Baker passed away, her husband Keith and their three children, including Morgan, chose to honor her memory by creating the Wendi A. Baker Memorial Fund. True to Wendi's love for the arts, the fund helps Coldwater students attend music and theatre camps across Michigan, opening doors for young people to follow their passions, just as Wendi did.



“CAMP AND TRAVELING INTERNATIONALLY HAS HAD SUCH A POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE WAY THAT I LOOK AT THE WORLD AND EVEN THE WORLD THAT I GO THROUGH IN EVERYDAY LIFE. IT’S MADE ME APPRECIATE THINGS MORE, WORK HARDER, BE MORE SOCIAL AND OPEN TO PEOPLE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, LEARN TO TRY NEW THINGS/FOODS! IT REALLY DID CHANGE ME A LOT.” - MORGAN BAKER



Board of Directors

Don Germann
Chair

Patti Miller
Vice Chair

Keely Beemer
Treasurer

Brian Miller
Secretary

Salwa Alsuraimi
**not pictured*

Morgan Baker

Shari Deevers

Jeff Gallup

Karen Hargreave

Josh Jones

**not pictured*

Janet Rucker





Staff

Erica Heminger
Executive Director

Veanna Sargent
Communications & Program

Mallory VanWagner
*Childcare Implementation
Team Lead*

Ashli Vogler
YAC Advisor

Financials

Assets

Cash

\$612,583

Investments

\$9,678,859

Notes Receivable

\$234,735

Other Assets

\$5,033

Assets

\$10,531,2010

Liabilities

Accrued Expenses

\$12,637

Agency Liability

\$162,875

Total Liability

\$175,512

Net Assets

\$10,355,698

**Total Liabilities
and Net Assets
\$10,531,210**

This is an unaudited statement for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2025. BCCF's annual audit is currently in progress and is estimated to be completed in January 2026. At that time, audited financial statements will be made available on our website at www.BrCoFoundation.org.

TYPES OF FUNDS

UNRESTRICTED

Donors can create named unrestricted funds to support the current and future quality of life in our area and give the Community Foundation discretion to use the annual income for a broad range of community projects that respond to changing needs.

FIELD OF INTEREST

This type of fund allows donors to identify and support a broad charitable purpose or category of interest, such as the arts, education, or a particular geographic area in the Community Foundation's service area. These funds are flexible and allow the Community Foundation to meet emerging needs and opportunities in each interest area.

DONOR ADVISED

With these funds, donors work with the Community Foundation by reviewing grant proposals from the Community Foundation and by proposing grants to organizations and projects they discover. Advised funds become unrestricted or field-of-interest upon the death of the donor or at the end of a specified period.

DESIGNATED

Designated Funds are created to support one or more specified organizations that the Donor names at the time the fund is established. Distributions from these funds may provide general benefit to a particular organization or may be specified for a specific program or project of the organization.

AGENCY

Agency Funds allow a charitable organization to establish a fund to provide for their general financial support or for specific programs or projects the organization sponsors.

SCHOLARSHIP

The Community Foundation administers scholarship funds through one centralized application process. Donors may contribute to the Community Scholarship Fund or, with a minimum balance of \$50,000, donors can create a separate named fund for scholarships.

TYPES OF GIFTS

CASH

Gifts of cash are most popular for many people who make smaller contributions to the Foundation. The cash gifts contributed each year help the community's endowment funds grow and allow the Community Foundation to expand our support to the community through grants.

SECURITIES

The Community Foundation gratefully accepts gifts of securities. If either public or private securities have appreciated over time, the owner may incur substantial capital gains taxes if the stock were sold outright. The donation of appreciated securities can offer the donor attractive income tax benefits, including relief from capital gains tax liability.

GRAIN OR COMMODITIES

The Branch County Community Foundation can accept gifts of grain and other commodities to local participating elevators to any fund held at the Branch County Community Foundation. These gifts allow the donor to maximize the tax benefits while supporting the causes they care most about. Donations can be directed to any fund, including our unrestricted endowment.

IRA ROLLOVER OR QCD

If you are the age of 70 ½, you can transfer up to \$108,000 directly from your individual retirement account (IRA) to the Branch County Community Foundation tax-free. If you are 73 or older, this gift will count toward your required minimum distribution. DAF's are not qualified under this giving option.

REAL ESTATE

Gifts of real estate can include homes, condominiums, apartments, undeveloped land, farmland, and rental property. Such gifts may help the donor alleviate management costs and responsibilities if the property were held, and capital gains tax and broker's fee if the property were sold. When you give gifts of real estate, the Community Foundation in turn sells the property, and – depending on the amount – contributes the proceeds to an existing fund of your choice or opens (or increases) your own fund with the income from the sale. You receive a charitable tax deduction equal to the fair market value of the property, and you pay no capital gains tax on the sale.

INSURANCE

Many people are surprised to learn that their life insurance policies can become a charitable gift. Normally, the need for life insurance protection lessens as an individual grows older. Children are grown, self-supporting, and through college; the mortgage has been paid; and an estate of other assets has been acquired. The insurance has served its original purposes, and can become a gift to the Community Foundation



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CFNS

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FOUNDATION**

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