

Your Community Foundation

This is the first of a quarterly series about the Branch County Community Foundation. In between quarterly articles, we will answer frequently asked questions each Saturday. To submit a question, email us at info@brcofoundation.org or call 517-278-4517.

The Branch County Community Foundation is an IRS-recognized nonprofit charity that serves Branch County and Colon, Michigan. We're pleased to have the opportunity to let you know a bit about us and some of the ways we might help you make positive changes in the communities you love!

Our official mission is "to promote charitable giving, build endowments and other charitable funds, and connect community resources." One of our main purposes is to encourage people to give locally – give where we live, where we can see the results, and where we make a place where our children and grandchildren can thrive. We also help create different "pots" of money, what we call "funds", and give a portion of those funds away each year in financial support to other charitable organizations and for scholarships to colleges and trade schools. As an organization that looks at all of the qualities of the place we call home, the Community Foundation finds ways to connect groups working on the same issues, identify local resources that we can build on, and convene local leaders that are interested in working with us to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods and small towns.

Promoting Charitable Giving. We champion local charitable giving because local dollars focused on locally-created solutions work better, than state and federal grants with highly restricted uses. And so, in addition to raising funds within our organization, we support the fundraising efforts of other area charities. When our charitable partners are strong, they have the capacity to join us in tackling some of the more difficult issues that our communities face.

Building Endowments and Other Charitable Funds. We work with donors who want to make a difference by creating permanent, long-term, and short-term charitable funds.

We currently hold over 130 charitable funds. With those assets we are able to support the arts, education, economic development and jobs creation, homelessness prevention, children and families that experience food insecurity, public space renovations, and more! In addition to current gifts, many people have made provisions in their wills or trusts, so they can continue to support the causes they care about and creating a lasting legacy.

Connecting Community Resources. We're better together. We serve on over fifteen local, regional, and state alliances. Indeed, the Community Foundation was created through such partnerships.

In 1990, the Coldwater Rotary Club had \$50,000 in its foundation (most of it coming from their annual Rotary Show). As the Club's foundation committee discussed how they were going to invest in Coldwater, they began to think about the many, long-term benefits of a county-wide foundation. They also thought about helping to find a way to encourage others to invest as well. In November 1991, the Coldwater Club held a meeting with other local Rotarians who soon joined the effort. The founding Rotaries then reached out to Council of Michigan Foundations for their expertise. By the end of 1992, the Branch County Community Foundation was official.

That initial \$50,000 donation, a WK Kellogg Foundation matching grant, and over 4,000 donors helped the endowments entrusted to us grow to over \$7 million. And we've given away \$13 million in grants and scholarships. For the past 21 years, we've been given beautiful office space in the garden level of Southern Michigan Bank & Trust's building at 2 West Chicago Street, Coldwater. That's the power of working together.

Current staff includes Colleen Knight, who has served as the director for over 20 years; Erica Heminger, who is in charge of program and donor relations; and Sarah Gruza who is interning with us until August. There are also two advisors who mentor our youth grantmakers (Youth Advisory Council).

In addition to staff, there are over 30 volunteers serving on committees and our board of directors. Our fifteen-member, donor-led board, consists of volunteers from all over Branch County and the Colon area and includes two members of our Youth Advisory Council. These dedicated volunteers have expertise in business, governance, finance and other skills we need to operate transparently, efficiently, and effectively.

There's so much more we'd like you to know! To learn more, you can contact us at 517-278-4517 or info@BrCoFoundation.org.