Just a few years ago—it seems so much longer now—we decided to name this magazine “Endless Possibilities” because we saw those two words as a summary of our organization and our community’s potential. I want you to know that the events of the last several months have not diminished our belief in those two words. From our response to the global pandemic’s local impact to our $10 million, 10-year commitment to equity, The Community Foundation remains dedicated to realizing its vision, “a vibrant region with opportunity for all.”

In some ways, nothing has changed; in other ways, everything has changed. We at The Community Foundation have redoubled our efforts to Engage, Invest and Lead, a three-word mission statement that now embraces daunting challenges—and, yes, opportunities—that once would have been unthinkable. And, like you, we know that we must accept uncertainty and embrace greater flexibility as we adjust. And readjust.

If you follow us on social media or have read about us recently, you’ll know that The Community Foundation has met the challenges of the past several months in many ways, often by partnering with local government agencies and other organizations, sometimes through the creativity and ingenuity of staff and our Board of Trustees.

Our donors and fundholders have shown remarkable optimism and commitment, and it’s their dedication— their continuing investment in this community—that makes it possible for our organization to celebrate the endless possibilities you’ll read about in this issue. While we are two counties and dozens of cities, towns and villages, we are also one community—and several of the stories in the pages that follow demonstrate a remarkably powerful sense of that community in the face of adversity.

As we look to the end of the year just a few weeks from now, I am confident that the challenges overcome in 2020 have strengthened our resolve as a community to meet whatever lies ahead. Together, we’ll build a brighter future—thanks to you; and thanks to our community’s “endless possibilities.”

Alicia Dicks
President/CEO
The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties
From the earliest days when the community first began to feel the impact of the global pandemic, The Community Foundation, its donors and partners responded to meet rising needs. To date, a broad range of efforts has directed more than $2 million to nonprofit organizations and, through them, supported thousands of residents who have felt the direct and indirect effects of the public health crisis.

“Our donors, nonprofit organizations, businesses and area residents really stepped up to help those in need,” said Jan Squadrito, senior community investment manager at The Community Foundation.

“The fund we established in partnership with the United Way of the Mohawk Valley has really made a difference.”

The Mohawk Valley COVID-19 Response Fund was launched in March, when it was becoming clear the pandemic impact in the community was going to be serious and long-lasting. Within days, a rapid-response application review and award process was established, and the first awards from the fund promptly went to recipients. All told, the fund awarded more than $1 million to nonprofit organizations, with Community Foundation donor-advised funds committing more than $390,000 to the effort. In addition, donor-advised fundholders awarded 85 grants exceeding $761,000 directly to nonprofits for emergency needs, general support and food security.

Squadrito joined Lindsey Costello, donor relations manager, and Morgan Mielnicki, community investment coordinator, on a joint Community Foundation-United Way review committee, which met frequently to review requests from nonprofit partners, ensuring that funding went where it would have the most impact.

**NEEDS SUPPORTED**

- PPE/Cleaning Supplies and Equipment
- Telehealth/Healthcare Needs
- Food Distribution
- Technology
- Basic Needs/Program Assistance
- Program Outreach

**MOWA MOWELL COVIT-19 RESPONSE FUND**
Among some of the creative partnerships that helped frontline workers and others in need:

- A gift card challenge through Rome Community Foundation raised over $25,000 to purchase gift cards to local restaurants which were distributed to healthcare workers at Rome Memorial Hospital.
- The Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce, Saranac Brewery and The Community Foundation partnered on a collaboration that funded gift card purchases for frontline workers in support of local small businesses.
- Through an employee matching gift program, Rising Phoenix Holdings Corporation granted more than $37,000 to support organizations all over the country providing essential relief services.
- United Way of the Mohawk Valley held a Change Round-Up program, asking Price Chopper customers to round up their bill in support of the Mohawk Valley COVID-19 fund.

In addition, The Community Foundation hosted two virtual forums for nonprofit organizations to learn more about their immediate and continuing pandemic-impact-related needs—information that helped to guide evolving grantmaking and community investment strategies—and collaborated with additional partners to support the following efforts:

- Oneida County’s distribution of free milk donated by Dairy Farmers of America and the American Dairy Association North East.
- “Little Falls Essentials: Supporting Those Who Support Us” campaign to raise money for gift cards to essential workers.
- Oneida County’s Youth Driveway Art Contest.
- Community Foundation of Otsego County’s COVID relief fund to support nonprofits in Otsego County.
- Blue and White Bow Mission initiative ribbon display campaign to demonstrate public support for healthcare workers.

“Our donors really made this happen with early and significant commitments,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “Our partnership with United Way demonstrated that our two organizations, working together, can better meet community needs during extraordinary times.”

“Through the help of this emergency fund, we have been able to secure supplies and educational materials to go out every Friday into underserved areas of Utica and provide masks, sanitizer and printed cards with information to help keep families safe.”

“Thank you to The Community Foundation team and the United Way for supporting our tenants during this critical time. By connecting them virtually with their loved ones, this has directly improved their social well-being, fighting the negative effects of isolation.”

“We are truly grateful for your support. This grant money means more families were added to our client list and received three full days of nutritious food.”

MOHAWK VALLEY FRONTIERS

THE COUNTRY PANTRY

THE COMMUNITY AT SUNSET WOOD
Our community is known for coming together in a time of crisis. We would like to thank the many Community Foundation fundholders who joined us and contributed to the Mohawk Valley COVID-19 Response Fund or granted directly to nonprofit organizations meeting COVID-related needs.

- A. Richard Cohen Family Fund
- Adirondack League Club Community Fund
- A ll In For Vin Memorial Fund
- Andy Mazloom Fund
- Bull Family Fund
- C.G. Philanthropic Fund
- Christopher and Deborah McGrath Family Fund
- Clark Family Fund
- David and Janet Griffith Family Fund
- Dicks Family Fund
- F.X. Matt II Memorial Fund
- Hero Fund America Fund
- Janice Luck O'Connor Friends Fund
- Joan B. and W illiam F. O'Shea Family Fund
- Kevin "Bing" Crossley Memorial Foundation Fund
- M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund
- Macartney-W allace-Weiler Family Fund
- Margarets Gaffney & Van W aes Fund
- Martin and Susan Bull Family Fund
- Mele Family Fund
- Michael and Lois Silverman Family Fund
- Nazareth Community Impact Fund
- Raymond L. and Linda G. Allen Fund
- Richard L. and Jean P. W illiams Fund
- Rising Phoenix Fund
- Robert and Sara Smith Fund
- Ronald and Sheila Cuccaro Family Fund
- Senator James H. Donovan Memorial Fund
- Utica National Group Foundation Fund
- Utica Pythian Foundation Fund
- Vogel Family Fund

Nonprofit organizations receiving funding for pandemic impact-related needs through mid-July included:

- Abraham House
- Academics First
- ACR Health
- American Red Cross
- Arc Herkimer
- CAP-Z1
- Catholic Charities of Herkimer County
- Catholic Charities of Oneida and Madison Counties
- Center for Family Life & Recovery
- Charles T. Sitrin Health Care Center
- Compassion Coalition
- Copper City Community Connection
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Cornerstone Community Church
- Dodge Pratt Northam Art & Community Center
- Empowered Pathways
- Feed Our Vets
- Foothills Rural Community Ministry
- Greater Utica Community Food Resources
- Hello Health
- HomeOwnershipCenter
- Hope House
- Hospice & Palliative Care
- ICAN
- Johnson Park Center
- Joseph Michael Chubbuck Foundation
- Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York
- Little Falls Community Outreach
- Little Falls Hospital
- Masonic Care Community of New York
- Mohawk Homestead
- Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency
- Mohawk Valley Frontiers
- Mohawk Valley Health System Foundation
- Nascentia Health
- On Point for College
- Parkway Center
- Presbyterian Homes Foundation
- Rescue Mission of Utica
- Resource Center for Independent Living
- Rome Alliance For Education - Rome
- Rome Alliance For Education - Waterville
- Rome Memorial Hospital
- Rome Rescue Mission
- Salvation Army - Herkimer
- Salvation Army - Rome
- Salvation Army - Utica
- St. John's Food Pantry
- St. Margaret's Corporation
- The Center
- The Community at Sunset Wood
- The Country Pantry
- The House of The Good Shepherd
- The Kelberman Center
- The Neighborhood Center
- Upstate Cerebral Palsy
- Upstate Family Health Center
- Utica Safe Schools Mohawk Valley
- Valley Health Services
- Valley Residential Services
- Veterans Outreach Center
- YWCA
For many Herkimer and Oneida county residents, the fall 2019 storm is a distant memory. But for those whose homes and businesses suffered damage from flooding caused by nearly seven inches of rain in just a few hours, life may not yet have returned to normal.

Beyond the immediate impacts—travel restrictions, road closures, power outages—the aftermath challenged many area residents, some still recovering from similar damage suffered in July 2017. Some properties in especially hard-hit neighborhoods were condemned; many others were left without heat and electricity.

Enter the Rising Phoenix Fund and its guiding founder, Ron Cuccaro, executive chairman of Rising Phoenix Holdings Corporation (RPHC) and its former President and CEO.

“We wanted to support people and give them the basics of what they need. They lost their homes, clothes, and some had no place to go,” Cuccaro said. “There are charitable organizations out there to help, but there is so much to do. From the Halloween 2019 flooding, agencies were receiving hundreds of applications for help—something needed to be done.”

RPHC acted, announcing it would match $50,000 in flood-relief donations received by The Community Foundation, and on top of that The Community Foundation approved another $50,000. Thanks to donor generosity and the Rising Phoenix Fund match, a total of $150,000 was added to Oneida County’s $900,000 dollar commitment to assist in community recovery. From the money raised, $75,000 went to Catholic Charities of Herkimer County to fulfill the needs of residents in Herkimer County.

“It was the perfect opportunity for us to do something quickly and we decided it would be good to leverage it into a match,” said Cuccaro. “It helped in recovery and getting money to people sooner to help them do what they need to do, while building awareness and showing that this cause is important in our community.”

RPHC is the parent company of the nation’s leading disaster preparedness and recovery firms, Adjusters International and Tidal Basin Government Consulting. Based in Utica, the corporation was founded in 1985 and has focused its efforts on disaster preparedness and recovery for 35 years. In 2018, RPHC established the Rising Phoenix Fund through The Community Foundation to further aid recovery efforts for natural disasters across the nation. And within months, RPHC was presented with a close-to-home need for the fund to address.

“Aligning the company’s grant with a match through The Community Foundation was a logical step in flood relief efforts,” said Steven Surace, RPHC president.

“Where areas have been struck multiple times over the past few years, it may not be catastrophic to the point where they can’t move back in, but they may have replaced their furnace or hot water tank more than once, or needed to have their basement decontaminated multiple times—they may not have the means to get through without assistance,” Surace said. “The professionalism and common goals that The Community Foundation has for the community are great, and it’s an organization that’s looking at the community as a whole and thinking about how they can best bring it forward.”

Helping others is integral to community growth. Moreover, it can be doubly appropriate to focus on charitable organizations providing assistance that gives back to the people who support those organizations. Helping community members recover and rebuild is an all-encompassing duty. As Cuccaro says, a rising tide lifts all boats. Such is the vision of the RPHC, in partnership with government and local businesses.

“As our community grows, develops, and prospers, we must help other people who need it,” said Cuccaro. “When it comes to giving, you get back more than you could ever give.”
The dedicated leaders that serve on The Community Foundation's Board of Trustees share a commitment to the organization's mission—helping to lead transformational initiatives that build and enhance community vibrancy.

James (Jim) A. Engler, Jr., president of Engler Electric, Inc., in Utica, joined the Board in 2017 after a recruitment process that started with a discussion with President/CEO Alicia Dicks.

"Honestly, it is one of the best things I have ever done," said Engler. "Collective decision-making with Board and subcommittee involvement presents opportunities to get your opinion heard and decide together how to move the community forward."

Engler Electric, a family-owned and operated electrical contracting firm on Columbia Street in Utica, was started by Jim's grandfather, August W. Engler, in 1924, and those generational roots have brought valuable perspectives to the organization. As a Trustee, he's a no-nonsense, local business owner, a proud "product of the trades." Although his path to the family electrical business took him first to college, it's the critical advice his father provided that remains uppermost in his mind.

"He said, 'You need to get into the apprenticeship program and do the same training that all of our workers go through. If you plan to oversee company operations, you need to learn how to do the work in the field.'"

"I completed the IBEW Local 43 NECA Joint Apprenticeship Program and became a journeyman wireman and it was an excellent experience for me," said Engler. "You think you know everything when you come out of college, but you don't understand everything. College prepares you to think about a lot of things, but it doesn't give you all of the answers."

Engler speaks highly of the phenomenal trade programs in this area, noting that our region will need a great many more skilled workers because of the construction taking place now and over the next several years—including Cree's technology development in Marcy and the Downtown Utica hospital project.

Q&A

Why is this community important to you as a business owner?

I was born and brought up in this community, so I have lived in the Utica area my whole life. I think it's second to none in quality of life and affordability for young people.

With all of these opportunities for new jobs, job growth, and new job industries, it's a no-brainer for a young person. It's a great place to get married young, start a family, raise that family and educate them locally without some of the big city costs that impede that.

What changes are you excited about locally?

Probably the biggest thing I am excited about is the change in people's attitudes. This used to be such a naysaying place. People are much more positive about the area, which is a significant improvement. Attitude is something that gets passed on to future generations. I think it's the best thing that is happening in this area right now.

What does the future look like for The Community Foundation's Board of Trustees?

The diversity of the Board is very important, and it's more important now than ever before. The Community Foundation's Board should reflect the diversity of its community members culturally and professionally with leaders from different organizations and industries.

People rooted in the community probably have good insight as to where the Board and The Community Foundation should be going. It is essential to know how this area has progressed to where it is today to see how we're going to advance. Additionally, new influences bring about innovation. The Community Foundation has transformed positively over the last few years. I think diversity in our community and The Community Foundation's leadership is a win-win. You don't fully realize how much good this organization does until you get involved.
OUR Newest FUNDS

ADIRONDACK LEAGUE CLUB COMMUNITY FUND FOR EDUCATION
A donor-advised fund established by Adirondack League Club to support the educational endeavors of students in the Central Adirondack region of the Adirondack Park.

ADIRONDACK LEAGUE CLUB SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by Adirondack League Club to award scholarships to students in the Central Adirondack region of the Adirondack Park.

ALIVIA PAIGE MOYLAN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by the Moylan family in memory of 12-year-old Alivia Paige Moylan who passed away in May 2020. The fund will honor and remember her spirit for many years to come, providing graduates of W-Hitesboro Central School District with scholarships.

ANIMAL ALLIANCE OF GREATER SYRACUSE FUND
An agency fund benefiting Animal Alliance of Greater Syracuse, an animal welfare organization working toward safety and humanity for all animals.

ASF CZECH FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Magdalen M. Czech for general charitable purposes.

ASF CZECH SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by Magdalen M. Czech to provide support for students attending Union College in Schenectady.

BONNIE AND DARREN WOODS FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Bonnie and Darren Woods for general charitable purposes.

CHRISTINE MADIA MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Utica Dollars for Scholars to make scholarship awards in the name of Christine Madia.

CHRISTOPHER AND DEBORAH McGRATH FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Christopher and Deborah McGrath for general charitable purposes.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF OTSEGO COUNTY FUND
An agency fund established by the Community Foundation of Otsego County to provide support for and invest in the educational and social needs of the residents of Otsego County.

CRAZY GOOD FOUNDATION FUND
A fiscal sponsorship of Crazy Good Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit whose mission is to generate funding for essential resources and services that ensure the well-being, stability, and development of motherless children.

EMPOWERED PATHWAYS FUND
An agency fund to benefit Empowered Pathways, a nonprofit organization with a focus on providing employment, mediation and advocacy services to women, youth and families in the area.

FUNDS TO BENEFIT THE NEW HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY
A designated fund established to provide support for the New Hartford Public Library.

GENUNG FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Frederick M. Genung for general charitable purposes.

GLADYS AND ED WASKIEWICZ FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Jerry Kraus for general charitable purposes.

HART FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by Todd Hart and Terry Hart to award scholarships to students that have resided in the 1969 Fire District area of the Town of Trenton.

JANE LISBETH WATTS MEMORIAL FUND
A field-of-interest fund established in memory of Jane Lisbeth Watts to provide care for dogs housed at no-kill shelters.

JULIANA WEBER FUND FOR TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
An agency fund benefiting Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church located in Utica.

KATHLEEN A. PERREAU LT FUND
A field-of-interest fund established in memory of Kathleen A. Perreault to provide support for area libraries and scholarships for local students.

KATHLEEN A. PERREAU LT FUND TO BENEFIT THE NEW HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY
A designated fund established in memory of Kathleen A. Perreault to benefit the New Hartford Public Library.

KIRKLAND TRAILS FUND
An agency fund to benefit Kirkland Trails, a nonprofit organization that is developing a network of multiuse trails, paths and bike lanes owned by the Town of Kirkland.

LINDA LEOR GRANDE YOUTH AMBASSADOR SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by the Broadway Theater League of Utica to provide academic scholarships to the participants of its Youth Ambassador program in memory of longtime board member Linda Leogrande.

MICHAEL AND LOIS SILVERMAN FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Michael and Lois Silverman for general charitable purposes.

PROSPECT SOFTBALL FIELD RENOVATION FUND
A field-of-interest fund established by Town of Trenton to support the renovation of Prospect softball fields.

STREICHER T FAMILY FUND
A field-of-interest fund established in memory of Catherine H. Streichter to benefit and enhance the lives of residents of the City of Utica.

SWANN FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by John and Patricia Swann for charitable purposes with a particular focus on racial equity and social justice.

VOGEL FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by David and Kathryn Vogel for general charitable purposes.
There are many ways to memorialize a loved one's legacy far into the future. It can be as simple as continuing a tradition that the person loved, planting a tree in their memory—even just celebrating their life on a special occasion. For Jerome Donovan, honoring his remarkable father—a giant in the New York State Senate for many years—by giving back to the community that meant so much to him was important.

In 1991, the Senator James H. Donovan Memorial Fund and the Senator James H. Donovan Scholarship Fund were established at The Community Foundation to continue the Senator's 30 years of commitment to public service and his love of community. In 1998, the memorial fund was amended to establish The Community Foundation's first donor-advised fund.

The memorial fund supports organizations that serve local youth and families through education, arts and culture, literacy, recreation, and social services. Since its creation, the fund has awarded more than 130 grants to over 50 community organizations, totaling nearly $185,000.

“Continuing my father’s legacy of advancing educational opportunity, promoting the arts and economic development and advocating for disabled, veterans, and the preborn is the most rewarding part of supporting different organizations,” says Donovan, fund advisor. “Knowing my father as I did, he would say, ‘Is there even more that we can do?’”

With the community pulling together during this challenging time, Donovan realized that there was indeed more to be done. The Donovan fund made one of the largest grants in its history to the Mohawk Valley COVID-19 Response Fund, established to meet the needs of those nonprofits most impacted by the crisis.

“At this difficult time and given the objectives of the COVID-19 Response Fund, there was no better way to assist the communities he served for more than a quarter century,” he said. “Beyond that immediate need, we generally work to identify programs, projects and agencies that my father would have supported, both personally and in his legislative initiatives. The Community Foundation has been a cooperative partner, always ready to offer advice, facilitate our grant recommendations and help us make a larger impact by partnering with others on projects within our field of interest, but beyond our means.”

One local organization that Senator Donovan identified with was the Utica Zoo. In 1988, he obtained state funding to help establish its Siberian Tiger exhibit, and the Zoo dedicated it to his memory shortly after his death in 1990. Twenty years later, Donovan renewed the memorial dedication with a $5,000 grant from the fund to support the purchase of two African Lions, Moni and Bakari, for the Zoo’s “Big Cat” exhibit.
Though it was an opportunity to assist the Zoo in its mission to protect endangered species and support a quality of life showcase in our region, it was equally as important for our family to continue my father’s legacy of service and his shared interest in the conservation of endangered wildlife.

Then, the Zoo began discussing the idea of having a “naming campaign” for the newest addition to its family, Moni and Bakari’s lion cub, to ensure sustainable funding and care for some of the Zoo’s larger animals. The Donovan fund’s $5,000 grant jumpstarted the campaign, and Donovan was asked to name the cub. Over the last nine years, “Donovan the Lion” has become quite an attraction at the Zoo. Today, the naming campaign now includes a component that requires a multi-year commitment to sponsor a portion of the animal’s care and housing.

The Donovan family also created a scholarship fund to benefit students in Oneida, Herkimer and Lewis counties who are attending Mohawk Valley Community College or Herkimer College. “Donovan Scholars” must demonstrate academic prowess, involvement in community affairs and financial need. Thanks to the fund, nearly $40,000 in scholarships have been awarded to help provide higher education to area students.

“Partnering with The Community Foundation makes abundant sense,” Donovan says. “The Community Foundation provides ease of administration, opportunities for collaboration, and the confidence of knowing recipient organizations are qualified and screened nonprofits. Your investment in the community is professionally managed to maintain principal and ensure years of future grantmaking.”

Keeping a legacy alive is rewarding in many ways, especially by creating real, tangible impact in people’s lives and their community. Through acts of generosity, Donovan is fulfilling his commitment to keep the spirit of his father’s work and image ever present—a gift that we as a community will continue to benefit from for years to come.
Many people think of “community” as a group of people who live in the same place or area. Just as important is one of the word’s other definitions, the sense of friendship between and among different people or groups that gives them something in common. These two kinds of “community” go hand in hand, and we’re fortunate to live in a place that embraces both—we come together in times of need, we help others when we can and we welcome all with open arms. These key ingredients are served up regularly at Mother Marianne’s West Side Kitchen, a soup kitchen at the corner of Columbia and Varick streets in Utica.

Opening its doors for the first time in 2008, Mother Marianne’s was started by Gilbert Nadeau, who was then a deacon at St. Joseph & St. Patrick Church. The need to implement hospitality services came after repeated requests from parishioners and neighbors for food, clothing and other help. From soup and sandwiches a few days a week, Mother Marianne’s has grown exponentially, providing those in need more than 55,000 meals a year and other important services.

The soup kitchen was named after Marianne Cope, a 19th-century German immigrant who grew up in the parish and attended school there before joining the Sisters of St. Francis in Syracuse. Her devotion to the sick, especially her decades of work caring for those suffering from leprosy in Hawaii, left an indelible legacy, and she was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

From the very beginning, the organization has been run by volunteers, providing a full meal service during lunch hour on weekdays and bagged lunches on Saturdays and Sundays. Its success and ability to run at full capacity daily can be attributed to its dedicated volunteer staff and board, and supportive donors.

“I would say we have about 45 volunteers,” said Ed Morgan, Mother Marianne’s kitchen director. “I couldn’t do what I do without them, the place just couldn’t run—we have the best volunteers ever.”

Donations to the kitchen come in many forms, funding from The Community Foundation, food contributions from area restaurants and stores, and individuals who drop off non-perishables or cash.

“Our busiest months happen to be our slowest fundraising months, but we manage to do it every year,” Morgan said. “This place kind of manifests what it needs. Some days, we don’t have any cakes to put out for dessert, next thing you know someone walks in the door with six sheet cakes—it happens an awful lot.”
And, Morgan says, it’s not the amount of a donation that matters most. “A guy walked in and he had the dirtiest, crinkliest two dollars I’d ever seen in my life and he says ‘Hey, I want to give this to you, you help me out a lot!’ That two dollars meant so much more than you could even imagine.”

Nurturing an environment that feels like home, volunteers aren’t there just to prepare and serve the meals. They’ve formed friendships with patrons, making it a comfortable and welcoming place for all. When you walk in during a bustling lunch hour, you see strangers from all walks of life sitting together, sharing good conversation, laughter and a warm meal. It’s almost as if they’ve known each other their whole lives.

“It’s not just about feeding people, it’s about making them feel comfortable and being the place they want to come— somewhere where everybody knows them,” Morgan says. “We try to make everybody feel like somebody and in their day-to-day life they don’t get that, they don’t have a lot of people looking out for them.”

In addition to meals, Mother Marianne’s provides monthly health screenings from local physicians, haircuts once a month, informative appointments with insurance companies, and the “West Side Boutique,” a store filled with free clothing, toiletries, toys and more. The boutique started off as a small spot in the basement, but quickly grew to fill a large classroom on the upper level of the building. Started by one of the kitchen volunteers, Nancy Robert, the store was her way of “doing something more.”

Community Foundation Donor Relations Manager Lindsey Costello grew up in the West Utica neighborhood. “My family used to walk to St. Joseph & St. Patrick Church every Sunday. Ed, the board and all of the volunteers are truly unsung heroes that provide for some of the neediest people in our city and are always looking out for others— they are doing God’s work.”

The Community Foundation was one of Mother Marianne’s early supporters, helping with the purchase of a walk-in freezer when the organization first started out. Since then, The Community Foundation has awarded more than $91,000 for various projects and needs.

In 2018, the soup kitchen received The Community Foundation’s $10,000 Community Choice Award to help build a service window between the kitchen and dining room, improving access to meals and alleviating problems with overcrowding. This award was sponsored by the Ronald and Sheila Cuccaro Family Fund. The new service window was “the best thing that ever happened to us,” Morgan said. “This place wouldn’t be what it is today without The Community Foundation.”

A dash of goodwill, a pinch of respect and a splash of compassion is just what this world needs right now. Mother Marianne’s is a shining example of how a little kindness can go a long way, and what true gifts surround us in our community. Continuing to live by its motto, “to treat everyone special because everybody who comes here is somebody,” is a life lesson that we all can—and should—take something away from.
The Center, formerly known as the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, has propelled its mission forward and undergone dramatic changes in the last few years.

After discussions about a new name began more than a decade ago, and a lot of strategic planning, the nonprofit's staff and board came to a realization.

“We are a refugee center—that will always be the heart of what we do,” said Shelly Callahan, executive director of The Center. “But we are also much, much more, so we wanted a name that allowed us to capture all of the things that we do.”

With that in mind, the organization decided to take a big leap forward. In September 2019, with the help of $1.75 million from Empire State Development Corporation, The Center moved to Bleecker Street in Utica. The new location’s welcome center area has made The Center more open-facing for the entire community—engaging partners in new ways and enabling services for refugees to expand to include adult education and job placement.

“The new space has allowed us to become the idea of welcome and to enact that idea,” said Callahan. “The welcome center allows us to face a larger portion of the community—not just refugees, not just immigrants—but everybody, and it also allows us to do the work of welcome differently and more intentionally. It’s all a part of fulfilling our mission.”

The challenges that refugees face in Utica today are the same as they have been for decades—including language and cultural barriers; accessing safe, affordable housing and transportation; getting a job and professional advancement, and so much more. Those are the challenges, but many opportunities exist here—and The Center is the central hub for those seeking to access them.

In addition to refugee resettlement, The Center’s other offerings include immigration and citizenship assistance, a traffic safety program, an employment department, an office for new Americans, written and spoken language
services, a variety of case management services, and even opportunities to lease space in its new building.

“The refugee resettlement program in Utica is something that this community should be enormously proud of,” Callahan says. “To be designated ‘The Town That Loves Refugees’ by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is a tremendous honor. To me, that speaks to the kind of people we are as Uticans. It speaks to the heart of this community, that this is a good-hearted and generous place.”

Hardworking immigrants have contributed a great deal to the economic revitalization happening throughout the region, as described in a 2014 New York Times story, “A New Life For Refugees, And The City They Adopted.” At that time, as many as one-fourth of Utica’s population of 62,000 was refugee families that created—an economic engine for the city, starting small businesses, buying and renovating houses, and bringing new life to the community.

With the global pandemic putting refugees at higher risk because of language barriers, low-income and immigrant communities alike faced an enormous threat. The Center received early support from the Mohawk Valley COVID-19 Response Fund for an awareness campaign with multilingual billboards, social media posts, website updates and direct outreach in 25 languages. The Center has taken the challenges presented by the pandemic’s impact in stride.

In July, The Center worked with New York state, Oneida County, the City of Utica, and Chobani to offer residents free coronavirus testing, and a clinic site at Utica’s Tabernacle Baptist Church administered more than 500 tests—with interpreters on hand to assist. Through awareness efforts in partnership with Chobani, The Center is continuing to encourage people to get tested, including the refugee and immigrant populations.

When the pandemic upended plans for the organization’s traditional World Refugee Day celebration in Hanna Park, The Center took an innovative approach to make it happen. Adhering to social distancing guidelines, staff created a virtual walk/run, “A Walk in Their Words,” allowing participants to listen to refugee and immigrant audio stories and hear their personal experiences and journeys. The goal was to raise awareness, build community and raise dollars to support agencies across New York state that serve refugees and immigrants and have experienced recent funding cuts. The event was well-supported with many participants and sponsors, including the band Moe.

Visual artwork aided in the celebration, created by Patrick Fiore, an artist from upstate New York whose work is influenced by human rights issues.

Tek, a father of three from Bhutan, who escaped persecution and spent 18 years in a refugee camp before coming to the US, shared his story and this universal message:

“I don’t want you to take me as a person from a different universe, take me from your heart. I wanted to make my family thrive in the United States, just like you. So consider them, accept them—they are your brothers and sisters.”
Take a few turns off any main street or highway in our two counties in the summer, and you’ll find fields of corn, strawberry patches and cows grazing, all punctuated by big barns and silos—as far as the eye can see. Fruit stands and family farms abound. The two-county community has something invaluable here—agriculture. Local farmers, growing and raising food, cultivated in our communities’ backyards, distributed across the region, state, and beyond.

With all the production that takes place locally, it would seem like an easy task to get nutritious locally grown food from the farm to our tables and our children’s cafeterias. And when health and dietary concerns arose among young people in Herkimer and Oneida counties, Martin J. Broccoli, agriculture economic development specialist at Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Oneida County, and a team were tasked to find out why healthy local options weren’t available in our schools.

The farm-to-school concept has existed for a while, with states like Colorado, Washington, Michigan and Vermont seeing its potential early on. In Oneida County, the concept gained traction in the early 2000s when CCE began working with Waterville Central School District to address students’ growing diet-related health issues. As a result, CCE’s Farm to School Program supports the increased use of locally grown products in school food in the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OHM BOCES) service area—31 schools in 14 districts—with a combination of cafeteria-based initiatives and classroom and community-based activities.

CCE’s program offers nearly 13,000 students the ability to purchase healthy school lunches, connecting their daily eating habits with dozens of farmers and producers across the Mohawk Valley. In recognizing the critical role schools play in shaping positive eating behaviors, the program aims to build strong partnerships with farmers while educating students, teachers, and community members more about their food.

As part of its longstanding commitments to youth, health and education, The Community Foundation supported the Farm to School Program’s start-up costs in 2016, providing two years of funding for a district-based educator who conducted sampling, taste testing, and classroom education in the Waterville Central School District. Waterville served as a pilot site for the program, and success there led to its expansion to schools throughout the OHM BOCES service area, including Clinton, Holland Patent, New Hartford, New York Mills, Otskany, Remsen, Sauquoit Valley, Westmoreland, and Whitesboro.

From The Community Foundation’s initial funding, the program’s successful expansion has attracted additional support—including four years of state funding from New York State’s Farm to School program and a second award from The Community Foundation in 2018 that served as a springboard for more farm-to-school activities in the area, strengthening the chances for future funding.

“These awards were game-changers, allowing us to take our farm-to-school efforts to the next level,” said Kate Dorr, OHM BOCES assistant school lunch director. “Students are going to be exposed to locally grown food regularly. That shift is essential in changing the food culture of school lunch.”
Describe your role at The Community Foundation, and what projects and work you’re involved in.

My focus is on government relations and project management of community and economic development efforts. I’ve been working on the Vision Plan for Downtown Utica, Impact Center and the Herkimer County Community Development Plan. The projects I am involved with are truly transformational, and it’s so exciting to be able to use my skills and passions on a day-to-day basis. I say it all the time, but I really do have the best job in the world!

What do you think is the greatest thing about this area?

I think the greatest thing about this region is its desire to grow and excel. I’ve met quite a few great people locally, and they are all striving to make this area awesome. There’s so much new development and growth happening around us, it brings a sense of positivity.

What advice do you have for young professionals who are considering this as a place to live and work?

This is the greatest place to live and work; it has so much to offer for families, college students, tourists—and there’s no traffic! It’s so close to the Adirondacks, Finger Lakes and big cities like New York, Boston and Toronto. This biggest bonus is that you truly get all four seasons of weather.

You’ve worked on many projects relating to the revitalization of Downtown Utica. Where do you see it in 10 years?

In the near future, I really see Utica as a destination city. Not necessarily as a vacation spot, but as a place where people in Syracuse and Albany would consider moving because of all the amenities and the quality of life it has to offer.

Tell us about your professional history and how you came to work at The Community Foundation.

After I completed my MBA, I got a job in personal finance and investing. Soon after, I was hired to do community engagement and policy advocacy for a tobacco prevention program. It was an unbelievable opportunity where I learned that I loved being involved in government and the community. I worked in this position for eight years and gained a wide range of experience with some great organizations. I wanted to get involved in economic development, which is how I ended up at The Community Foundation. (Did I already mention that this is a dream job?)

What do you enjoy doing outside of the office?

Honestly, my favorite thing to do outside of the office is to be with my wife, Jessica, and our four kids, ages 1 through 11, enjoying our home. We live on a small lake in Madison County and just love to swim and sit on the deck all summer. I love being outside and active in nature or working on projects around the house and lake. Jessica and I are very close to our families and stay involved in our local church.

What are your top three local restaurants?

I haven’t tried them all yet but so far, I love Ocean Blue, The Tailor and the Cook, and Delmonico’s.

What is your favorite inspirational quote?

“The legs feed the wolf.”
Those who love art believe it lives inside us all, making everyone an artist at heart. Believing that creating something imperfectly perfect is an experience that anyone, at any age, should engage in, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute (MWPAI) provides unconventional and collaborative art opportunities for all.

MWPAI has served the greater Utica region for nearly a century, offering a renowned permanent collection, special exhibitions and educational programs. It has also committed to enhancing artistic appreciation and understanding for a special population in the area—seniors with Alzheimer’s disease, dementia and other memory impairments.

What started out as the “Meet Me at MW P” program for groups of local seniors to visit the museum for private tours has branched out to include a more interactive component called the Meet Me + Make program.

Meet Me + Make is an off-site program that takes place at local rehabilitation and nursing facilities. MWPAI staff take their tools and knowledge to the residents so they can learn and create their own masterpieces. Projects include collage-making, clay sculpting, pastel drawing, and watercolor painting, spanning a wide gamut of artmaking disciplines so that there’s a little something for everyone.

“Since we have this amazing program where they can come to the museum and look at the art, we wanted them to be able to make some artwork for themselves,” said Amy Francisco, museum educator for docent and tour programs at MWPAI. “We started the program out of this desire to give them that satisfaction and that joy that comes from creative making.”

The idea for the Meet Me at MW P program came in 2016 from Alpine Rehabilitation Center in Little Falls, which wanted to expand the impact and reach of its resident art-making programs. As a participant in both programs, Alpine has seen noticeable improvement in the well-being of its residents, both in going to the museum to enjoy looking at art, and having the opportunity to create their own art.

“These activities have been so beneficial, giving our residents a chance to express themselves freely, to give their opinion, and really have fun with it and try something new,” said DeAndra Macri, Alpine’s activities director. “This is a great bonding experience. We’ve had some residents that really refused to participate, but once they saw the interaction and how people were having fun, they just gravitated towards the program and had a good time—it was wonderful to see.”

To assist with the expansion of both programs, the Mele Family Fund, an avid supporter of projects involving seniors, awarded MWPAI $10,000 in 2019.

“There is no way we could have offered these programs without support from the Mele family,” said Francisco. “The art supplies, the lesson development, every aspect is supported through those funds.”

With the success of the Meet Me + Make program, MWPAI has been looking at other possibilities. In the future, the program could expand to places like
"I loved it, I got to play with clay. I felt like I was a kid again." -BILL

Upstate Cerebral Palsy, The House of the Good Shepherd or anywhere that people could benefit.

"To have this outlet and creative reinforcement where people can talk about something and participate in their art-making program—that activity and that feeling reinforces their self-esteem and sense-of-self," says April Oswald, museum education director at MW PAI. "It has been a revelation for all of us, and we appreciate the ability to make a great impact with this opportunity."

Art and learning go hand in hand. At any age, it's important to keep learning and creativity alive. MW PAI's art-making programs are doing just that for those who can benefit from it most, giving them a sense of purpose and a creative outlet, all while reinforcing its mission to advance the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts in the community.
THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IS MAKING AN IMPACT IN ALL CORNERS OF OUR COMMUNITY.

**ADIRONDACK FOOTHILLS TRAILS ALLIANCE | $5,000**
Support from the Janice Luck O’Connor Friends Fund for the development of a youth skills mountain bike track at Old Forge-McCauley trail system in memory of Bob O’Connor.

**CARE NET PREGNANCY CENTER OF CNY | $4,000**
A grant from the Abigail J. Freitag Memorial Fund to support staff training for new ultrasound machines.

**ICAN | $2,100**
A grant from the Margaret Gaffney & Van Waes Fund to purchase seven new cribs for Evelyn’s House, a transitional living facility for new and expectant mothers.

**PARKWAY CENTER | $150,555**
Grants from The Community Foundation and Mele Family Fund to support start-up costs such as furnishings for a newly developed senior community center in Verona, providing health and wellness opportunities, education, recreation, clubs, and transportation.

**THE KEYS PROGRAM | $5,000**
Support from the M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund to expand the KEYS Music Therapy program, providing free music sessions to cancer patients, the elderly and individuals with autism or disabilities.

**THE NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST | $10,000**
A grant to support the New York State Census Equity Fund, a donor collaborative helping to ensure a fair and accurate census count in 2020.

**THE SALVATION ARMY OF ROME, NY | $15,000**
Funding to assist with the purchase of a vehicle used to transport children and adults to programs and to pick up food donations.

**WOODSVALLEY ALPINE SKI RACING FOUNDATION | $6,500**
An investment to upgrade the timing system used for all home races, allowing for bigger races with more efficient timing.
Invest In Your Community

How To Give >

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2608 Genesee Street
Utica, NY 13502

Phone
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Ways To Give >

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Real Estate
Stocks & Securities

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Plan Your Legacy
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Future Fund
Life Insurance

Generate An Income
Retirement Plans
Charitable Gift Annuity
Charitable Remainder Trust

Interested In Learning More?
Contact Nick Grimmer, CFRE, director of giving strategies,
315.731.3737, ngrimmer@foundationhoc.org.

A copy of our most recently filed financial report is available from the Charities Registry on the New York State Attorney General’s website (www.charitiesnys.com) or, upon request, by contacting the New York State Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 28 Liberty Street, New York, NY 10005, or The Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties, 2608 Genesee Street, Utica, NY 13502. You also may obtain information on charitable organizations from the New York State Office of the Attorney General at www.charitiesnys.com or 212.416.8401.

Invest In Your Community

The Community Foundation was thrilled to be ranked as one of the best places to work in 2020 by the Central New York Business Journal—go team!

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Mention Idaho and many people think “potatoes”—but not Martin Babinec. Ask entrepreneur, philanthropist and Community Foundation donor-advised fundholder Babinec about the western state, and he’ll tell you about the Innovation Collective, launched in the Idaho city of Coeur d’Alene, a concept he believes can transform the Mohawk Valley’s burgeoning tech economy.

With first-year support provided by The Community Foundation, Innovation Collective experts visited Herkimer and Oneida counties in fall 2019 to develop an assessment of the current economic environment, understand the area’s resources, and uncover how their ground-up approach could impact our community. The result: Innovation Collective Utica (ICU), an economic transformation project aimed at developing a community-wide education platform that will engage and activate residents and grow the economy.

Launched in 2014, Innovation Collective transformed Coeur d’Alene, unlocking $57 million in new investments, launching 50 LLCs, encouraging innovative education programs and inspiring more than 15,000 program participants across the country. Through curated events, mentorship, skills training, corporate partnerships, placemaking and software, the Innovation Collective model creates grassroots social experiences that help people start and grow innovative businesses. The organization’s goal is to help people in a region become a community, learn new skills and create vibrant places where they can work and live.

“Innovation Collective came out of the desire to teach human beings that they have magic inside of them and teach them what they can do and to follow their dreams,” said Chris Cochran, Innovation Collective’s vice president of communities. “Our focus is everyone and anyone. We start by gathering people together and teaching them how to be an inclusive community again.”

Through the local assessment, Innovation Collective identified community qualities The Community Foundation knows well—hard-working, good people who care deeply about their community. Several themes emerged, described as: Lack of Hope, Pockets of Progress and Desire for Change. The findings informed a recommended framework. Innovation Collective proposed a five-year campaign featuring several phases strategically aimed to make an economic impact and transform the Mohawk Valley community from the ground up.

“At the heart of what we do, we believe that you can transform an economy through human flourishing,” said Cochran. “When people feel good about themselves, have resources and a community behind
them—they can start transforming the economy by creating things that didn’t exist before.”

The first phase of ICU is already underway, beginning with “Fireside Chats,” a local speaker series. Through inspirational and aspirational storytelling, entrepreneurs and successful community members share what they’ve learned, reminding those gathered that everyone is capable of doing incredible things.

Fireside Chat speakers have included accomplished bodybuilding and gym owner Bob Donnelly, AIS CEO Chuck Green, technology entrepreneur Bob Bojanek and City of Utica Councilmember Delvin J. Moody.

Innovation Collective Utica’s next deliverable was a twice-monthly meet-up called “Coffee and Concepts” for people interested in learning more about technology and brainstorming about opportunities and challenges. ICU encourages people to start companies on the spot, having launched successful businesses in that way elsewhere. The evolving effort also seeks to secure support and engagement of community stakeholders and identify an economic niche that best fits area history, resources, educational systems, economy, and passion.

One of the organization’s main attractions was its in-person gatherings, but it has adapted to pandemic realities. Innovation Collective Utica Community Manager Taylor Brose has encouraged members of the “ICU Tribe” to join in local digital community experiences. The group even hosted Utica’s first Coffee and Concepts “from the comfort of your own home,” streaming the event via an online meeting platform.

Emphasizing the difference between physical distancing and social distancing, ICU continues to offer a series of digital experiences, including inspirational training events, mentorship experiences, book clubs, social gatherings, idea sharing sessions and pitch days to help keep members connected.

After months of digital get-togethers, the ICU community held a socially distanced Fireside Chat at Utica’s Sickenberger Lane in July. Community Foundation President/CEO Alicia Dicks, one of the featured speakers, highlighted the importance of professional perseverance and community networking, encouraging attendees to define and pursue their unique version of success.

“Alicia is a perfect example of a leader in this community who is pouring her heart and soul into making Utica the city that everyone can say they are proud to be a part of,” Brose said.

“One of the big advantages here in Utica that doesn’t exist elsewhere is that The Community Foundation plays a role in this community that is unique from what we typically see,” Cochran said. “The organization is doing gutsy things, taking a leadership role to accomplish things that I’ve never really seen a community foundation do before. It’s been refreshing to watch their hard work and dedication come to life.”
You probably read or heard the news in July—The Community Foundation Board approved a $10 million commitment for the next 10 years to address “racial equity and social justice issues.”

Like many in the community, you may have wondered: What does this mean?

Of course, no one can explain right now exactly how the next decade’s commitment will be realized; and the Board of Trustees itself said $10 million for 10 years was “an initial commitment,” just a start.

The “Community Equity Initiative,” as it’s called, is only beginning to take shape. But there are some things that we do know and can share with you, after a few months into this latest phase of The Community Foundation’s evolving work.

Considering recent events across the nation and around the world that have led many communities to face these and similar issues, it’s clear that renewed emphasis on race and equity is now part of a national conversation, one that touches individual communities in different ways. In our two-county community’s case, the Board’s thoughtful decision—reached after much organizational research, community engagement and discussion—means that The Community Foundation will now be able to build on decades of community investment with a new focus on work aimed at addressing systemic and systematic racism.

Some who take part in the community conversation on social media and elsewhere say that the worst events, especially violent deaths and property destruction, are far from the Mohawk Valley. But the focus on shootings, rioting and looting is only part of deeper and more profound challenges that persons of color have and continue to face across the nation—and even though some in our two counties do not experience and may not understand systemic racism, its challenges and effects are terribly real.

Despite all government and nonprofit efforts—including The Community Foundation’s $90 million in grants over its entire history—decades of data show that many in our community experience greater adversity and/or lack opportunity in critical areas: economic stability, educational achievement, health and wellness (including childhood lead poisoning), to name only a few. While The Community Foundation has never done, but is now committed to do, is address these larger, systemic challenges head-on—with the entire community at the table.

“This is a critical time for our community and the country,” said David Manzelmann, Board chair. “The Community Foundation is building on its past work in taking this major step toward realizing its vision, ‘A vibrant region with opportunity for all.’”

With approval of the largest single investment in the organization’s nearly 70-year history, the community, especially community leaders of color, will now be the driving force behind a multi-faceted approach to expand opportunity involving multiple partner organizations, local governments and, most important, community residents.
The immediate priority, because of its unique challenges and the critical nature of the current national conversation, will be race; and the overall initiative will also address obstacles to opportunity in terms of ethnicity, national origin, and other factors.

Through building community involvement, creating "impact centers" that serve families in high-needs neighborhoods, and attracting even greater financial investments in the initiative work from outside the community, the Community Equity Initiative will focus on these and other measures to bring about much-needed change.

To help the community move the needle on these big challenges, donors, nonprofit partners, government and community leaders, residents, regional and national peers—the entire community—are invited to sign the MV Equity Pledge to show that they care about these issues and are on board for change. Those interested in getting involved can learn more and take the pledge at mvequitypledge.org and show support by displaying the flyer attached to the back cover of this publication.

Another critical part of the initiative will be empowering community leaders of color to advance solutions. The Community Foundation will support and help facilitate development of a collaborative, coalition-style model to work toward systemic change. The Community Foundation’s convenings of Black community leaders began more than five years ago, and in recent months staff and Board members have met and talked frequently—virtually and in person—with a growing number of partners to help determine next steps, for near- and long-term strategies.

"Community voices must be heard, and they must also be empowered," Dicks said. "The Community Foundation will listen, facilitate, act as a sounding board and support solutions. But we cannot tell residents struggling from lack of opportunity that we understand their problems or have all the answers, because we don’t. Our role is to help the entire community work toward changes that will ensure opportunity for all."

In addition to providing administrative and other support for that coalition or group, The Community Foundation’s Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund will serve as a starting point for attracting potential national funders to the overall effort. The local fund was established in June with a $50,000 Community Foundation commitment and a $50,000 grant from the Ronald and Sheila Cuccaro Family Fund.
“We’ve all seen the news and heard the terrible stories from across the country,” said Ron Cuccaro, a member of The Community Foundation Board. “We have to take a stand as people who care about Utica and the Mohawk Valley that we will do more. We’re challenging individuals and organizations who have the financial ability to do what they can to support this effort.”

Dicks said the initiative represents The Community Foundation’s new and unprecedented focus on issues that lie beneath multiple community challenges—economic, social, cultural—that prevent many residents from fully participating in all that the two-county community offers. Impact centers, community-wide engagement, and the Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund will be part of a continuing commitment to view all Community Foundation efforts through the lens of improving racial equity and social justice outcomes and addressing systemic and systematic racism in Herkimer and Oneida counties.

In addition to committing significant charitable assets, The Community Foundation will build on years of community engagement to ensure that all those willing to work toward a better future community can participate. Jawwaad Rasheed, a community leader whose noteworthy work with the Mohawk Valley Frontiers and Junior Frontiers has changed lives for young people of color for decades, will be deeply involved—not only on behalf of his volunteer work with the Frontiers, but as The Community Foundation Board’s Chair-elect.

“The time has come when we as one community can explore and realize real change,” Rasheed said. “This initiative and all that it includes will facilitate a community collaboration to face and finally address systemic and systematic racism and underlying causes of so much that troubles our society.”

**ARTIST SPOTLIGHT:**

**DAVE MENTUS**

The MV Equity Pledge logo was the hand-drawn creation of a local artist whose flare and style came through in the design. Utica native Dave Mentus says his love for art started during his first year in college.

“I went in as a graphic designer at MVCC. I used to draw on the side just for fun, that was my first introduction to art. From there, I began painting and drawing which slowly evolved into finding found objects; repurposing tables, painting on tables, and painting on whatever I could just so that I could see colors and the way patterns look on furniture. Now I’m strictly digital, I draw on my iPad.”

“I look at more art than I create myself and I look for that uniqueness in an artist. I try to get an idea of who that person is and what decisions they make in their artwork. That influences me a lot—the work that goes in behind the creation of a piece. I try to emulate that and do that with my own experience.”

His design and illustration work has been seen throughout Utica on downtown banners, in shows at Inkorporated, a mural at Handshake.City and much more. His hobbies include finding and refurbishing old furniture, freelance graphic design, painting and drawing, along with exploring nature with his daughter London.

See more of Dave’s art and design on Instagram @dropdeaddave_
WE ARE DEDICATED TO CREATING A VIBRANT REGION WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.