With the arrival of each new year come new beginnings, challenges and—most important—opportunities. The Community Foundation continues to strengthen and support the nonprofit organizations that do so much good in our community, even as we take on more complex initiatives that will leave an impact for years to come. Your commitment and generosity make possible both traditional grantmaking and the newer, increasingly important, initiative work that will fulfill our vision: a vibrant region with opportunity for all.

The year that just ended was one of the most significant ever for donor-advised funds at The Community Foundation. Fundholders went above and beyond, with 469 grants totaling $3.28 million invested in our community—an increase of more than 50% from 2017. Your generosity provides opportunity for growth and ongoing success in organizations that continue to meet vital community needs.

In the following pages, you will read about projects funded by The Community Foundation’s first-ever Community Choice Awards. Each of the five winning organizations received a $10,000 grant from donor-advised funds. Due in part to the contest’s overwhelming success, and the enthusiastic feedback received from donors and nonprofit organizations, planning for 2019 is already in the works. Also in this issue, we feature the Utica National Group Foundation Fund and its committee chair, Bernard Turi. And, as always, we share with you a number of worthwhile investment opportunities seeking funding; please consider supporting one.

On behalf of President/CEO Alicia Dicks, our Trustees and our staff, please accept my best wishes for 2019. We’re truly grateful for the opportunity to work together with you to make our community a better place for years to come.

Nick Grimmer, CFRE
Director of Giving Strategies
In October, Community Foundation staff, Trustees and fundholders surprised the winners of the first-ever Community Choice Awards, delivering five $10,000 ceremonial checks “prize patrol” style to mark the occasion. More than 70 nonprofit organizations in Herkimer and Oneida counties submitted grant proposals for consideration, with 15 finalists receiving nearly 14,000 online votes to determine the winner of each category.

“The response that we received from the community in support of these outstanding organizations was overwhelming,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO. “Our nonprofit partners do work that benefits every member of our community, and the Community Choice Awards provided people the opportunity to show their support for organizations that have made a difference in their lives.”

The winners have some exciting plans for the funding, and the resultant projects and programs will enhance each organization’s community work.

**ANIMALS CATEGORY**

**SPRING FARM CARES**

Spring Farm CARES is an animal and nature sanctuary that focuses on the care of unwanted and abused animals, the spiritual connection between humans and animals, and the spaying and neutering of dogs and cats. Funding will support an ongoing program that helps low-income Oneida County residents have their pets spayed and neutered.

“Thank you to all the community members who voted and to The Community Foundation and the Staffworks Charitable Fund for this wonderful opportunity,” said Dawn Hayman, vice president of Spring Farm CARES. “This $10,000 grant will pay for the spaying and neutering of a lot of feral, stray and homeless cats, helping to make a big difference in our community.”

**ARTS & CULTURE CATEGORY**

**ROME CAPITOL ARTS COMPLEX**

The Rome Capitol Arts Complex provides cultural and educational opportunities for the community through Rome’s historic theater and ancillary spaces including Cinema Capitol. Funding will be used to enhance those spaces and develop classrooms to support two arts education programs, serving more than 1,750 individuals annually. The project is also an integral part of the City of Rome’s downtown revitalization and an essential component of Rome’s West Dominick Street Arts District.

“We want to thank all our supporters who voted and the Bull Family Fund for their generosity,” said Kylie Pierce, development director of Rome Capitol Arts Complex. “Education is a huge part of our arts mission. This funding will provide the resources needed to build and enhance our children’s theater program.”
HEALTH & WELLNESS CATEGORY
MID-YORK LIBRARY SYSTEM

The Mid-York Library System aims to improve and expand library services in Herkimer and Oneida counties. Funding will launch a health and fitness project, providing fitness equipment and other materials for 35 libraries across the two counties to help community members meet health and wellness milestones.

“This is really going to make a difference to all of the libraries throughout Herkimer and Oneida counties, to have the resources to help our communities become healthier,” said Anne Debraggio, director at Kirkland Town Library. “Thank you to everyone who voted for our libraries and to The Community Foundation and Mele Family Fund for making this possible.”

HUMAN SERVICES CATEGORY
MOTHER MARIANNE’S WEST SIDE KITCHEN

Mother Marianne’s West Side Kitchen is open seven days a week, serving nearly 5,000 meals each month. As the number of individuals and families in need continues to increase, many rely on receiving a hot meal at the soup kitchen. Funding will be used to open a service window between the kitchen and dining room to improve access to meals and create the space needed to maintain sanitary conditions. The project will alleviate overcrowding and create a welcoming, safe and healthy environment for visitors.

“It was exciting to be a part of the Community Choice Awards,” said Ed Morgan, kitchen director at Mother Marianne’s West Side Kitchen. “We’re incredibly grateful to the community members who voted and the Ronald and Sheila Cuccaro Family Fund for sponsoring our category. This award will allow us to better serve individuals and families that come through our doors.”

YOUTH CATEGORY
UTICA ZOO

The Utica Zoo creates unique experiences and promotes public appreciation of wildlife through community education, conservation and recreation. Funding will support the installation of a glass viewing window for a new outside gibbon exhibit. In addition to the long-lasting exhibit enhancement, the Utica Zoo will implement a primate play program for children, where youth will engage in fun physical activities to instill an appreciation of the movement of primates, participate in a paint and snack workshop, and learn about animal behavior and training.

“It was so much fun to be surprised with the $10,000 prize by the donors from the M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund,” said Andria Heath, executive director of the Utica Zoo. “We couldn’t be more grateful to all the people who love the Zoo and voted for us. We’re excited to engage the next generation through enhanced exhibits, creating more opportunities for fun and learning.”

The Utica National Group Foundation Fund at The Community Foundation was created in 2014 with a $1 million gift marking Utica Mutual Insurance Company’s centennial. Grants made through this donor-advised fund supplement ongoing grantmaking from its own foundation held at Utica National.

Bernard Turi, Utica National Insurance Group senior vice president, chairs the fund’s screening committee, a nine-member employee group whose members serve six-year terms and help decide which organizations receive grants.

Turi’s role as chair differs slightly from the role of a committee member. In addition to reviewing grants with the committee, he is responsible for meeting with community members, organizing the committee meetings, discussing funding opportunities and working with The Community Foundation staff to bridge the partnership.

“Utica National Insurance Group takes great pride in the philanthropic work being done for our local community,” said Turi. “The company feels that it’s an obligation as a good corporate citizen to contribute to the community in which we operate to help those who are less fortunate—a way to give back to a place that has given so much to us.”

The Utica National fund focuses its grantmaking efforts on issues relating to poverty, education and helping youth and their families. “Family is of utmost importance—we like to see the family unit kept together; therefore, any services we can support that promote education and embrace the family core, we like to get behind.”

One organization that has been a prominent aspect of Utica National’s journey has been the Johnson Park Center—specifically the Head, Hand & Heart Family Enrichment Program, the fund’s first grant recipient. In 2015, the fund assisted the organization in launching the program whose mission is to give children ages 3 to 5 the opportunity to learn using technology, the ability to interact with other kids and develop skills to become school ready.

“The Head, Hand & Heart Program is special because it’s successful and is impacting youth in a positive way,” said Turi. “The fundamental work being done by the program helps make up for the disadvantages that some kids face educationally.”

Another organization the fund continues to support is Hope House. “Hope House is another example of great change—seeing positive things happen on a grander scale than they have in the past.”
In his experience as chair of the committee, Turi has been faced with difficult decisions since the committee cannot approve all grant proposals that are submitted.

“In a perfect world, we would love to say yes to all of the asks that come in, since they are all well-intentioned causes. We choose the ones that focus on the most important issues in our community, such as poverty, health, education, shelter and safety.”

Utica National has valued its relationship with The Community Foundation over the last five years and looks forward to a continued partnership for years to come. Turi believes that The Community Foundation is well positioned to assist Utica National in putting the money in the right hands, for the right programs.

Looking ahead, the fund is focused on supporting larger programs and projects that address issues relating to youth and their elementary education journey.

“There are many great programs already, but I think it’s key to focus on nutrition, safety and education for the youth population, and the sooner the better,” said Turi. “We are aiming for earlier intervention on a greater scale.”

As an area resident and Utica National employee for more than 30 years, Turi is enthusiastic about the changes that have already happened in our community, along with the changes that are to come.

“I think our society would have far greater issues if these nonprofits weren’t around to address the major challenges—their work is invaluable.”
CHRISTOPHER AND KARI MAX FAMILY FUND
The Christopher and Kari Max Family Fund was established by Christopher and Kari Max for general charitable purposes.

EMPIRE RECYCLING FUND
The Empire Recycling Fund was established by Empire Recycling Corporation in Utica, for general charitable purposes.

HUD-SON WARRIOR FUND
The Hud-Son Warrior Fund was established by Dan and Jodi Hudon for general charitable purposes.

RISING PHOENIX FUND
The Rising Phoenix Fund was established by Rising Phoenix Holdings Corporation to aid recovery efforts for natural disasters across the nation.

ROBERT L. STEFFENSEN FUND
The Robert L. Steffensen Fund was established by Robert L. Steffensen for general charitable purposes.

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The Scalzo, Zogby & Wittig Insurance Fund was established by Gary Scalzo and Stephen Zogby for general charitable purposes.
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*PHOTO TAKEN AT THE HAGE BUILDING, A LEED GOLD CERTIFIED FACILITY IN DOWNTOWN UTICA.