While The Community Foundation offers many ways for those who love this community to enhance and enrich the lives of its residents, none is as effective and emotionally resonant as the donor-advised fund. Through you and our other fundholders, commitments made in the spirit of philanthropy and concern for others find a permanent purpose; and your gift knows no bounds.

In every issue of this newsletter, we feature donors and nonprofit partners who are making a difference. The story of Donald VanWaes and the Margarets Gaffney & Van Waes Fund is remarkable, and how the Arc Herkimer park came to be serves as an example of philanthropy made real. These are just a few examples of many; they are the reality behind the numbers.

And the numbers tell a story of their own. So far this year, more than $1.7 million has been awarded to our nonprofit partners from donor-advised funds. Thanks to your generosity, that number will continue to grow—and our community will benefit in ways we can only begin to imagine.

On behalf of The Community Foundation staff and Board of Trustees, and the communities we serve, I thank you for your support.

Eve Van de Wal
Chair of the Board of Trustees
“As a result of being on the grants committee, I became familiar with all the different funds and that was where it all started,” recalls Don. “My wife and I had talked about establishing a foundation, and as we discussed it more, we began to see all the potential challenges involved. How do you manage it? How do you decide what agencies to give grants to without the ability to supervise it all? The more challenges that we considered, the more it seemed that The Community Foundation was the place that could handle all of these matters and handle them very well.”

Don and Peg created the Margarets Gaffney and Van Waes Fund in 2004, named for Peg and her mother, to support education-related programs, as well as services that assist young mothers in need—two important causes they believed to be overlooked and underfunded.

Evelyn’s House was their first charitable investment, a decision inspired by Peg’s cousin who cared for unwed mothers in her home. Don reached out to several agencies to find out what services were available before learning of Family Nurturing Center founder Donna LaTour-Elefante’s desire to create a home for young mothers to raise their children. Once a property had been identified, the Van Waeses provided support for renovations and first-year operations.

“We were insistent on getting this place going and making it self-supporting,” Don said. “We knew it would be a success if we could get by during that first year.”

Personal experience inspired Don and Peg’s other charitable giving as well, including a long partnership with Notre Dame Schools. For example, Don’s family couldn’t afford to send him to college, but he was able to attend Cornell University thanks to the generosity of a kind woman he worked for as a teenager.

“I want to give other students that same opportunity. There are some children who want to go to Notre Dame but can’t afford it. For many years, my wife and I have been able to help with tuition and it’s something that I plan to keep doing.”

Having granted more than $300,000 to local nonprofits, the Van Waeses viewed this as their way to give back to a community that means so much to them.

“This was always the place. This was the place to be. My wife’s family was here, and our children were here and went to school here…we loved the community. It’s encouraging right now because suddenly there seems to be a lot more optimism in the community than there used to be, and that’s a good sign.

“Giving back over the years has made me a better person. I’ve always made it a point to go and visit the nonprofits we support. By seeing them firsthand, you begin to truly understand the need. It is satisfying to be able to help. It makes you more aware of other people and their challenges, and I think that is important for all of us.”

A few months after their 70th wedding anniversary, Peg passed away in December 2017. Don continues to guide their lifelong commitment to serving others through the fund, and he spends time with the couple’s 13 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren and his dog, Murphy.
Arc Park is the first and only public park of its kind in a nine-county region to provide a completely accessible outdoor recreation experience. Located behind the Arc Herkimer Business Park on East German Street in Herkimer, the brightly colored playground includes jungle gyms, swing sets, slides and distinct equipment for all age groups and abilities to enjoy. A wheelchair friendly fitness trail meanders throughout the park, connecting five exercise stations. Overlooking basketball courts and a softball field is the bandstand and concession facility—a gathering space for concerts, entertainment and events.

In June 2017, hundreds turned out for a grand opening celebration, the culmination of several years of planning, fundraising and collective support of many community partners.

“This has the potential to go beyond the Village of Herkimer and Herkimer County,” said Frank Reid, Arc Herkimer’s vice president for strategic development, predicted at the opening. “As it’s the only facility of its kind in the region, people can come here for a day and have a recreational experience they might not have otherwise because it’s not available in their area. That’s really the long-range vision for this park—to become a destination that will bring people together from all around.”

Now, after a year in operation, Arc Park is a daily recreational destination for hundreds of community residents and visitors from around the region. The park is host to many summer activities including youth programs, fitness groups, wellness events, craft fairs and band nights, with activities at the family pavilion nearly every weekend.

In addition to community engagement and an overwhelmingly positive response from local families, Arc Park has received promotional attention from The Arc New York and The Arc of the United States. The park will also be featured in an upcoming article in the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources newsletter.

These outcomes confirm The Community Foundation’s decision to support the Arc Park project and advance the organization’s long-time partnership with Arc Herkimer. In total, The Community Foundation contributed more than $200,000 to the $1.5 million park including grants from five donor-advised funds: A. Richard Cohen Family Fund, Albert S. Mazloom Family Fund, Bull Family Fund, Hummel Family Fund and M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund.

To cover the final cost of construction and ongoing park maintenance, Arc Herkimer continues to seek additional funding. Future goals for the park include the addition of accessible bathroom facilities (in spring 2019), a wheelchair accessible platform swing and a splash park area.

Collaboration among many partners helped accomplish the initial goal to create a fun-filled recreation park for all ages and abilities to enjoy—providing only a glimpse of the project’s ultimate potential.
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*PHOTO TAKEN AT THE HAGE BUILDING, A LEED GOLD CERTIFIED FACILITY IN DOWNTOWN UTICA.