We are emerging from a time that tested our organization’s strength, capacity, and resiliency. And whatever challenges lie ahead, the last year has made us stronger and allowed us to learn and grow in ways we never expected.

Our nation’s struggles with racial and social inequalities, illuminated by recent tragic events, have guided and informed our relatively new work that has been long overdue in this community; addressing racial inequity and social justice changes, tackling social economic instability, racial injustice and food insecurity. The Community Foundation continues to address these challenges through its commitments to neighborhood revitalization and impact centers, workforce development and healthy housing—working with nonprofit partners and residents. And our work goes on thanks to your generosity and love for this two-county community.

In this issue, we highlight Charles A. Gaetano, founder of Charles A. Gaetano Construction Corporation and longtime fundholder. We also feature the great work being done by Evelyn’s House in Utica. I hope you enjoy learning more about the organizations and people that help us in achieving our vision: a vibrant region with opportunity for all.

With so much exciting work happening, and the potential for real and lasting progress at hand, it is my privilege to help lead the Community Foundation. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, our staff, and the communities we serve, I thank you for your dedication. With fundholders like you beside us I’m confident that we will make a brighter future, together.

Sincerely,
Jawwaad Rasheed
Chair, Board of Trustees
ANN AND DAVID HARDEN FUND
A field-of-interest fund established by Ann M. and David E. Harden Foundation to support nonprofit organizations that provide for the basic needs of residents of Camden and McConnellsville, New York, and immediate surrounding communities.

JOHN AND DEANNA SAMMON YOUNG SCHOLARS SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by John and Deanna Sammon to provide scholarships to graduates of the Young Scholars Liberty Partnerships Program.

KIRKLAND ART CENTER CAMPAIGN FUND
An agency fund established by Kirkland Art Center, an active multi-arts center in Clinton offering classes, exhibitions, films, concerts and lectures.

LINDA AND SARAH COHEN FUND FOR MOHAWK VALLEY HEALTH SYSTEM
A designated fund by Linda and Sarah Cohen to benefit Mohawk Valley Health System, an integrated healthcare delivery system serving Oneida, Herkimer and Madison counties.

LOTIS B. HOWLAND FUND TO BENEFIT NEW HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY
A designated fund established by the estate of Lotis B. Howland to provide support for the New Hartford Public Library.

PARTNERSHIP FOR EQUITY IN THE PERFORMING ARTS FUNDS
Endowed and expendable donor-advised funds established by the Mohawk Valley Junior Frontiers Club that focus on promoting racial equity in the arts.
If the walls of Evelyn’s House could talk, they would surely say, “We provide a sense of safety and security where it doesn’t matter what happened in the past, we’re always going to open our arms and take care of you.”

For young and homeless women who are pregnant, parenting, or both, Evelyn’s House is Utica’s safe harbor for mothers—providing both transitional and rapid rehousing. Always safe and compassionate, it meets the needs of those dealing with pregnancy, motherhood, and other challenges, including those living with the threat of eviction or domestic violence, on the streets, or in an emergency shelter.

For many years advocates pointed to a service gap in the Utica area for expectant and young mothers facing difficult circumstances. In 2007 the late Donna Latour-Elefante, founder and executive director of the Family Nurturing Center, sought to fill that void. Naming it after her mother, she established Evelyn’s House, the only transitional housing for pregnant or parenting teens in the area.

A part of Integrated Community Alternatives Network (ICAN), Evelyn’s House continues to fulfill Latour-Elefante’s founding vision. No matter the difficult circumstances young women face, they can stay at the space for up to two years. During their stay, residents receive intensive case management, including evidence-based parenting and other classes to prepare them for employment, in addition to nutrition, health and wellness, mental health services, and guidance toward permanent housing.

“We really want to prepare them to be successful living on their own with their child or children,” says Allison Jackson, ICAN’s chief program officer. “We want them to become empowered during this transitional time in their lives.”

Having a roof over their heads and a safe place to stay allows young mothers to return to school or find employment. Evelyn’s House has a partnership with the Workforce Investment Board that takes them through job training and placement, with a goal of long-term employment.

Helping these young women often presents unique challenges.
“Because it’s a shelter, all the women who come to Evelyn’s House are homeless, threatened with homelessness, or fleeing domestic violence,” Jackson says. “These young women come to us with significant trauma history. Not only that, but they’re trying to parent. They’re either pregnant and scared and getting ready to have a child, or they’re currently parenting and carry all of these other stresses on their shoulders.”

While it can be a challenging time for some of the women, in some cases it’s the first time they’ve felt safe and secure at home. Past trauma can make for a difficult transition, but Jackson says that the women using these services are some of the most resilient individuals she’s ever worked with. From that place of safety and security, they’re able to work on other things, like life skills that they need to live independently and successfully with their children.

As moms get ready to complete their stay, they’re able to transition into permanent housing. This “rapid rehousing” program allows Evelyn’s House to cover the first several months of rent, with moms gradually taking on that responsibility as their economic situation stabilizes. And the program includes more than just rental assistance: two years of case management help can make a real difference for those just starting out.

In keeping with ICAN’s organizational philosophy, “family voice, family choice,” Evelyn’s House balances its rules and expectations for residents with the importance of hearing from young women who are adapting to significant life changes. Weekly house meetings provide a structure that does just that.

“We all sit in the living room in a circle with the kids running around, and it’s their chance to have a voice,” Jackson says. “The staff have a list and all the residents have a list of any concerns or anything they want to talk about or changes they feel need to be made to the program. It really is their chance to voice their opinion.”

The partnership between Evelyn’s House and the Community Foundation has been crucial to the program and dates back to its founding as part of the Family Nurturing Center.

“We’ve been super lucky and grateful for all the help that the Community Foundation has provided,” says Jackson. “The beauty of our relationship is that the Community Foundation will reach out to us and ask, ‘What are your needs?’”

Many donor-advised funds have supported Evelyn’s House for over a decade. In addition to general support, the Margarets Gaffney & Van Waes Fund has helped the organization with more immediate needs—funding a life skills coordinator staff position, a kitchen remodel, and all new cribs—and the Charles A. Gaetano Family Fund has also made several grants as well.

Thanks to generous donor support, dedicated staff and ICAN’s guidance, Evelyn’s House continues to realize Latour-Elefante’s dream: a more homelike, less institutional setting for our community’s young mothers and moms-to-be facing extraordinary challenges.
In many ways Charles A. “Chuck” Gaetano’s story is Utica’s story.

A son of Italian immigrants, his modest upbringing led to a lifetime of building: family, business, community, and philanthropy. And always with his wife, Connie, by his side until her passing in 2012.

“I was married 65-and-a-half years,” Gaetano says. “We were one.”

The numbers alone testify to an extraordinary family legacy: six children, nine grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren (and one more on the way). Business, community, and giving back have happened for well over half a century.

Early success as a masonry contractor in the 1950s evolved into the Charles A. Gaetano Construction Corporation, established in 1970, and the company has made its mark in myriad ways for more than five decades. That success, Gaetano says, enabled support for many great organizations, starting with helping relocate the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to its current Kent Street location.

Then came years of involvement with Utica College, where the Charles A. Gaetano Stadium and its Connie Gaetano Plaza bear witness to the couple’s steadfast support.

As a World War II veteran, Gaetano has been instrumental in helping the Central New York Veteran’s Outreach Center meet the needs of area vets. His donation of the former YMCA building on Washington Street in 2006 paved the way for the organization’s expanding array of services at the Charles A. Gaetano Veterans Complex.
For decades, in partnership with the Community Foundation, the Charles A. Gaetano Family Fund has been a part of his continuing effort to create positive impact for organizations, institutions, and people in need. From backing the campaign that established cardiac surgical services at St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center some 20 years ago to the Gaetano Fund’s more recent support for Mohawk Valley Health System’s downtown Utica project, he has made healthcare one of his top priorities.

“Sister Rose Vincent [the late CEO of St. Elizabeth’s] was a great woman to work with,” Gaetano says. “And I think what’s going on with the downtown hospital project, you’re going to see a big future impact on Utica and the whole community.”

Gaetano says giving back grew out of the community connections he found by getting to know others. “Just starting out in business, I got to meet a lot of beautiful people while serving on boards.” Starting a donor-advised fund was something he decided to do in 1999 to build future impact even as he responded to ongoing community requests for support.

“I thought, you know, ‘When I’m gone—because when you’re gone, nobody knows who you were and the boards change; who’s going to know what I would have wanted?—so I came up with the idea, to build something that will carry on.’”

In the beginning, Gaetano wanted to make sure that favorite charities would be taken care of for many years to come, and over time, the list has grown: Evelyn’s House, The House of the Good Shepherd, St. Joseph’s Nursing Home, the Rescue Mission of Utica, Resource Center for Independent Living, and many more.

“And that’s what we’re doing, we’re supporting these needs right along while we build that fund up for later on,” Gaetano says. “So 20 years from now, some of these organizations will be getting what they need to keep doing their work.”

Now, having recently celebrated his 98th birthday with a multigenerational gathering, Gaetano says he feels blessed that his many business ventures found success, which he and Connie returned manyfold to the community.

“I like helping people,” he sums up. “And I thank God for my longevity.”
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