Community foundations nationwide have operated in much the same way for more than a century, reacting to funding requests with traditional grants. However, today’s nonprofit community is under great pressure—struggling to obtain funding, attract and retain leadership and talent—while serving those in need.

Those who founded The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties could not have imagined the depth of distress in our community today. Even as we celebrate the accelerating economic rebirth of this area, many in the Mohawk Valley continue to face social divides stemming from race, ethnicity, gender and religion; they are challenged by poverty, childhood lead poisoning, diabetes, obesity and other ills.

Fortunately, those who established The Community Foundation, and generations of dedicated donors, invested in our future, allowing us to address unforeseen community needs as they arise. After a decades-long history as a significant grantmaker in this community, we must adapt our way of doing business to fulfill our mission to Engage, Invest and Lead.

No organization has all the answers, but we, together with our partners and donors, have the means and the will to chart a new course—one that will build on generations of philanthropy, and brighten the fabric of our community.

HOW WE WILL CREATE A vibrant REGION WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

Engage

LISTEN TO RESIDENTS
Our role in bringing about productive community conversations is critical. We will continue to connect with neighborhood residents who know how to solve the problems they face every day, and work with community partners to deliver the best results.

TACKLE TOUGH CHALLENGES
Focusing on “people, place and purpose,” we will work collaboratively with partners to ensure that investments yield meaningful outcomes. The community’s dollars should go where need and impact are greatest.

Invest

TAKE ACTION
When a community is hurting, the right response from its foundation is to swiftly and meaningfully address critical issues. While growing our endowment for the future, we need to make greater commitments—now—and we must invest more than token amounts.

PUT MONEY WHERE IT MATTERS
We will invest in blighted neighborhoods and struggling rural communities in meaningful ways, leading partnerships that provide solutions and critical services for residents. We will seek outcomes that benefit our community’s most vulnerable, in equitable ways.

Lead

GROW NEXT-GEN LEADERS
To build a better, more inclusive society, we must develop the kind of leaders we need. For years, community leadership has not reflected the diversity of shifting demographics; it needs to keep pace with the changing face of our community.

BUILD THE FUTURE—NOW
Community foundations have always invested for the long term, and rightfully so. But they have been slow to change, reluctant to take risks, unwilling to accept failure. To help our community succeed, we must balance prudence with proactive strategies.
Bernard Turi, Utica National Insurance Group senior vice president, chairs the fund’s screening committee, a nine-person employee group whose members serve six-year terms and help decide which organizations receive grants. In addition to reviewing grants with the committee, he is responsible for engaging and meeting with community partners, organizing meetings, discussing funding opportunities and working with Community Foundation staff to implement meaningful grants.

“Utica National Insurance Group takes great pride in the philanthropic work being done for our local community,” said Turi. “The company feels an obligation 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 Group Foundation Fund focuses its grantmaking 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,” said Turi. “Therefore, any services we can support that promote education and embrace the family core, we like to get behind.”

One organization that Utica National believes fulfills this important mission has been the Johnson Park Center—specifically the Head, Hand & Heart Family Enrichment Program. In 2015, the fund’s first grant assisted Johnson Park Center in launching the program, which serves children ages 3 to 5, providing opportunities to learn using interactive technology, engage 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.”

Hope House is another agency that the fund’s committee members believe is doing critical work in the community.

“Hope House is another example of great change—seeing positive things happen on a grander scale than they have in the past.”

Turi believes that The Community Foundation is well positioned to assist Utica National in putting money in the right hands, for the right programs. 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.”
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization / Initiative</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boonville Youth Athletic Association</td>
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<td>Mohawk Homestead</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>YWCA of the Mohawk Valley</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
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**Boonville Youth Athletic Association**

A grant from the Robert and Sara Smith Fund for a new youth playground at Boonville Elementary School.

**Dolgeville United Methodist Church**

Support from the Edward Peter Sidelko Community Food Fund for the food pantry to purchase meals during the holidays.

**Sharon Springs Joint Fire District**

A grant from the Hero Fund America Fund for CPR and first aid training for members of the fire department, as well as equipment for use by personnel during cold winter incidents.

**Cap-21**

Support from the Scott Stuart Fund for Inlet and Damon Fund for Inlet to build a centrally located emergency communications tower in the Town of Inlet, improving emergency response times and enhancing safety.

**Herkimer County College Foundation**

Support from M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund to equip a new classroom lab for training on “smart grid technology” electrical utility systems.

**Symphoria**

A grant from the Christopher P. Destito Memorial Fund to support Rome’s Honor America Days annual summer concert at Fort Stanwix National Monument.

**City of Oneida Housing Authority**

Start-up funding for the development of a community senior center in Verona to provide older adults with various recreation, education and health and wellness activities.

**Humane Society of Rome**

Funding for the purchase of a utility van to be used for animal transportation to the vet’s office and events.

**Workforce Development Board**

Support from the Mele Family Fund for the 15th Annual Mohawk Valley Construction Career Day, which provides young men and women with a firsthand look at construction industry careers.

**Cornell Cooperative Extension – Oneida County**

An investment to launch phase two of an agribusiness incubator to encourage local entrepreneurship in the agricultural and food sector.

**Mohawk Homestead**

Funding to repair the senior housing facility’s elevator in anticipation of 20 additional assisted living residents and increased use of second-floor rooms.

**YWCA of the Mohawk Valley**

Funding to develop and train a domestic violence team of law enforcement and client advocates to mitigate high-risk domestic violence incidents in Oneida County.
The narrative has begun to change, but with some parts of Utica’s new story developing faster than others, it can be hard to figure out what story we will be able to tell in the not-too-distant future.
“We decided that it was time to put the pieces together in a meaningful way, to make sure that all of the great things happening, and others that are just around the corner, work together,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “This is really a once-in-a-generation opportunity for this community to make the most of a rising tide of optimism, and the substantial and positive changes that many have been waiting for.”

With the backing of its Board of Trustees, The Community Foundation is leading an initiative that will result in a vision and action plan for Downtown Utica’s several districts, from Bagg’s Square and the Bleecker Street corridor on the east, to the Brewery District on the west; from Harbor Point on the north to Oneida Square and the arts district on the south. The new downtown medical center campus and the Genesee Street corridor will form the core of the plan; the proposed “U District” and Oriskany Street improvements are also critical elements. The result will be an “urban design framework” that will guide future development and other steps to make Downtown Utica greater than the sum of its parts.

“We has a rich history of architecture, tremendous natural assets and a wonderful diversity of social capital that this plan will build on,” said Kim Way, principal with global architecture and urban design firm NBBJ, which has been contracted to prepare the downtown vision plan. “We are excited to be a part of Utica’s transformation, and the plan envisioned for the city will provide guidance for future development, infrastructure improvements and placemaking opportunities—changes that will support a walkable and livable 21st-century urban center.”

Working with The Community Foundation and other partners, including the City of Utica, Oneida County, Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce, Mohawk Valley EDGE and Genesis Group, NBBJ engaged with a broad array of elected officials, community leaders, key business owners, and neighborhood groups in the early phases of its work. The firm also drew on previous planning studies and documentation, so that the current project complements existing and historical economic development and urban planning work.

“NBBJ and Kim Way have decades of experience in urban design, a global reputation and a who’s-who list of clients,” Dicks said. “As the principal city in our two counties, with so much happening now that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago, Utica deserves the best expertise—to ensure we realize the greatest possible return on our community’s investments.”

Building on success already evident, incorporating projects still in the planning stages and adding elements as yet unforeseen, the city and entire area can build a future that will surpass its historical heyday. Someday, Dicks said, people will look back on this time and say, “That’s when Utica found its future. That’s when the Mohawk Valley came together as one community.”
Communities across the nation are witnessing the rebirth of their urban cores—main streets have come alive once again with busy sidewalks, art installations and unique new businesses that attract customers who believe commerce can be as much purposeful as it is practical. It’s a trend being pioneered by small business owners and local entrepreneurs, including Smith Market owner Luciann Gould.

Smith Market, the winner of The Community Foundation’s 2016 downtown entrepreneurship challenge, officially opened its doors in 2018. Located at 412 Main Street in Utica, the natural food store and local market has transformed the former D.B. Smith & Co. building with a fresh new feel, while preserving many of the structural elements that characterize the building’s industrial downtown presence.

Gould was inspired by the growing demand for a natural food store and year-round local market in the downtown community. Her idea for Smith Market was born of out of the Oneida County Public Market’s success in Bagg’s Square.

“At that point, Bagg’s Square became a destination for like-minded people and community-oriented businesses,” said Gould. “My heart was set on this location. It was exciting to see all the local farmers and community members coming together at the public market.”

Gould was encouraged to participate in The Community Foundation’s entrepreneurship challenge, where she developed Smith Market’s business plan with the help of coaching and mentoring through Mohawk Valley Community College’s thINCubator programming alongside other aspiring entrepreneurs. Taking her idea through to the challenge finals, Gould pitched her plan for Smith Market, winning $25,000 to launch the business.

“Entrepreneurs like Luciann are an inspiration because they’ve found a way to integrate their personal passions into their careers,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “Local entrepreneurs are a growing part of a grassroots economic development resurgence in our region, and we’re thrilled that Smith Market is open in Downtown Utica, adding to the vibrancy and success of the city’s urban center.”
Bringing Gould’s vision for Smith Market to Bagg’s Square wasn’t a quick or easy endeavor. From design and construction, to acquiring inventory and local partners, Gould stayed determined.

“The Community Foundation has been an incredible resource throughout the start-up process,” she said. “Their support and guidance helped me navigate this journey as an entrepreneur, facilitating the connections I needed to keep the business on track and moving forward. I consider The Community Foundation’s partnership a significant part of why I’m here today and Smith Market’s doors are open.”

Encouragement from community members and a network of entrepreneurs helped open doors for Smith Market. Gould has even partnered with former challenge participants who’ve become vendors, selling their products at the market. Blair Bellamy, a two-time challenge contestant who runs his own aquaponic farming business, has joined Smith Market as market manager.

Smith Market offers a one-stop shopping experience for people living and working in Downtown Utica, a convenient marketplace for local products and unique gifts that showcase regional farmers, makers and growers.

“Our goal is to offer healthier options,” said Gould. “Overall, healthier people are happier people. At Smith Market, we believe that everyone should know where their food comes from and what is in the products they consume and use.”

Everything in Smith Market is meticulously curated, from the neatly arranged products and displays to the featured local artwork. Smith Market works with more than 50 local suppliers to carry fresh produce, meats, cheeses and whole foods, making sure every product is healthy and produced with organic practices. The market offers an assortment of grab-and-go items, including sandwiches, salads and soups, with gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian and healthy meat options, as well as a café bar with artisan-roasted coffee, cold-press juices, fresh smoothies and kombucha.

Gould takes pride in Smith Market’s community-based approach, working to become a model for other local sustainable food markets.

“It’s incredibly exciting to witness a culture of entrepreneurship developing in our downtowns,” said Gould. “I’m here because I’m doing what I love and have committed fully to pursuing my passion. It’s truly inspiring to meet others that share that same kind of passion. Together, we’re part of a local movement that’s developing a new way of thinking about how to make positive changes now and for our future.”

Gould hopes to encourage aspiring entrepreneurs and new businesses to consider a downtown location.

“It’s that kind of ambition that will transform the dynamics in this city. It’s the right time for entrepreneurship in Utica, New York—this is the place to make it happen.”
The organization has a long history of being forward-focused as demonstrated by its continued growth and willingness to embrace new technology and trends in its industry throughout the years.

CABVI's Focus on the Future initiative is a fitting example of the organization's commitment to proactive innovation. The largest component of the multiyear $14 million effort is the construction of a new 23,000-square-foot, $8 million state-of-the-art vision wellness center in Downtown Utica. CABVI’s current vision rehabilitation programs on Kent Street serve over 1,600 people in eight counties. The new center will allow the organization to accommodate twice that number and offer the latest technology and techniques to consumers, all while expanding employment opportunities for the visually impaired.

The Community Foundation awarded CABVI $300,000 in initial grants to acquire property and begin construction. Recognizing the tremendous impact this project would have throughout the region, The Community Foundation also offered a challenge grant. If CABVI could raise $500,000, The Community Foundation would match it dollar-for-dollar.

“CABVI continues to advance opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired in innovative ways that also promote economic development and neighborhood revitalization,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “Through the challenge grant, we hoped to inspire community members to support the mission and vision of this great organization and the work they are doing to transform our community.”

The community’s response to the challenge was overwhelming, with CABVI raising more than $1 million to secure The Community Foundation’s additional $500,000.

“To declare that ‘Central New York came through in a big way’ would be an understatement,” said Rudy D’Amico, president & CEO of CABVI. “Area residents did more than just meet the challenge, they doubled it. I am proud that CABVI’s supporters, which included many of The Community Foundation’s fundholders, exceeded the goal.”
Meet Our Team

Get to know John Swann, executive vice president at The Community Foundation, and his four-legged sidekick, Kendrick, a frequent visitor to our Genesee Street offices.

What do you find most enjoyable about working here?
Two things: the work itself, which is aimed at making this an even better community, and the people I work with—their talent, commitment, enthusiasm and energy.

What challenges exist in our community that you’re passionate about addressing?
This community has an opportunity to revise and update its story, to put things in perspective. Some of the area’s best and most challenging times are still within living memory, and it can be hard to move forward when you’re constantly making comparisons with the past.

Valuing our collective history—whether it’s what happened 50 years ago or 100 years ago—is important, but we need to recognize the good that’s happening now and the remarkable things that are taking shape. The community’s investments in itself, through The Community Foundation, are part of that past—and a big part of a better future, too.

Tell us about your professional history and how you came to work at The Community Foundation.
I worked as a broadcast journalist, in radio and television, for 20 years. After that, I was a public relations practitioner at SUNY Institute of Technology for 15 years. When I began to consider retiring, Alicia Dicks asked me about joining her team, and I liked what she told me about the organization’s direction.

What do you enjoy doing outside of the office?
Spending time with family—my wife, Pat, and my three daughters—and I try to find time to play the guitar and piano whenever possible.

Where are you from?
I grew up in Missouri, on a farm that’s been in our family since the 1830s.

What are your top three local restaurants?
The Tailor and the Cook, Aqua Vino and Craylee’s

What is your favorite quote?
It’s Mark Twain: “Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.”

MEET Kendrick

What breed of dog are you?
Part poodle, I’m told. Not sure about the rest of my ancestry, because I was a rescue.

How would your family describe you?
They’re fond of me, but they think I’m just an ordinary dog. Little do they know.

What is your favorite thing about visiting the Community Foundation?
The ladies. The ladies give me treats.

Do you have a favorite treat?
Yes, anything edible. And some things that aren’t.
When The Community Foundation decided to invest in a space of its own, the Board of Trustees envisioned a building that would become a true community asset—where partners could convene, collaborate and find innovative solutions to community challenges. As plans for the building project took shape, and former president/CEO Peggy O'Shea’s retirement approached, the Board made a commitment to set aside a space at its new location—a kind of garden—to commemorate her service and contributions to the organization. In December 2018, that commitment was fulfilled piece-by-piece, with the installation of an intricate mosaic in a courtyard at The Community Foundation’s 2608 Genesee Street home in Utica.
“This mosaic is a permanent reminder of the key role our staff play in the life of this organization, in service to the community, and recognizes the path that Peggy initiated,” said Eve Van de Wal, chair of the Board of Trustees at the time.

The mosaic brings to life a pictorial representation of our region’s vibrancy—capturing important landmarks and the natural beauty of our communities from the Erie Canal and Mohawk Valley to the foothills of the Adirondacks, including city centers and many points in between.

The one-of-a-kind mosaic was created by Oneida Square Public Art & Design, led by Cathy Marsh and her team of artists. From ideation to creation, the masterpiece took about six weeks to complete, with every individual component laid out by hand.

Oneida Square Public Art & Design—a social enterprise initiative of Oneida Square Project—was established with Community Foundation support in 2015 to revitalize urban neighborhoods through the creation of art and jobs for individuals with barriers to employment. Its artists create environmental streetscape amenities such as mosaic trash receptacles and planters, murals and other pieces that enhance municipalities’ main streets, parks and neighborhoods.
This vision for a “prize patrol” style event began many years ago, at the suggestion of Community Foundation Donor Relations Manager Lindsey Costello. “I was inspired by other community foundations’ award ceremonies for grant recipients and thought it would be exciting to incorporate an element of surprise when celebrating our nonprofit partners,” said Costello. “As The Community Foundation has embraced new ways of creating community impact, it seemed like the perfect time to introduce this unique grantmaking contest.”

As envisioned, the community-driven grantmaking contest promised to accomplish many things: to generate greater awareness of the critical work performed by local nonprofits, to educate community members on the grantmaking process and its positive impact on the greater community, and to engage Community Foundation fundholders in new and meaningful ways.

Five contest categories were selected based on The Community Foundation’s investment areas and matched with the charitable interests of five donor-advised fundholders that agreed to sponsor the contest by providing $10,000 awards for the winners of each category. With their support, the inaugural Community Choice Awards received the green light to move forward.

More than 70 nonprofit organizations throughout Herkimer and Oneida counties submitted grant proposals for projects in the categories of Animals, Arts and Culture, Health and Wellness, Human Services, and Youth. Community Foundation staff in consultation with category sponsors selected three finalists in each category and asked the public to help determine the winners.

Before any votes were cast, big checks signed or bundles of balloons inflated for The Community Foundation’s first-ever Community Choice Awards, there was just an idea.
As a collaborative process, grantmaking decisions are strengthened when those who know the most about an organization or program can share their input—and who knows better about the great work our nonprofit partners do than community members who engage with them each and every day? “Community members’ first-hand experience and knowledge of these nonprofits provides valuable insight when helping to select the most deserving grant recipients,” said Costello.

The Community Foundation worked closely with finalists to help each nonprofit promote participation, generate interest for their proposed projects and encourage supporters to vote. Public voting took place online in September 2018 with community members casting nearly 14,000 votes.

“The response that we received from the community in support of these outstanding organizations was overwhelming,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “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. Nonprofits strengthen our community through their commitment to improving the lives of those they serve. Community Choice Awards is uniquely positioned to celebrate this important work, engage community members and recognize the generosity of donors that support these local programs and organizations.”

In October, donor-advised fund sponsors took part in celebrating the outcome of their investment, joining Community Foundation staff and Trustees to surprise Community Choice Awards winners “prize patrol” style, delivering five $10,000 ceremonial checks to mark the occasion.

Community Choice Awards category winners represent a diverse group of programs and organizations that work to address a broad spectrum of community needs throughout Herkimer and Oneida counties.

“It was exciting to be a part of the Community Choice Awards,” said Ed Morgan, kitchen director at Mother Marianne’s West Side Kitchen, Human Services category winner. “We’re incredibly grateful to the community members who voted and the donors who sponsored the contest. This award will allow us to better serve the individuals and families we provide meals to.”

Community Choice Awards winners have some exciting plans for the funding, and the resultant projects and programs will enhance each organization’s community work. Many of the semi-finalists also received funding for their proposed projects from donors who learned of their work through the contest and were inspired to give.

“Many times, the smallest grants have the greatest impact because they mean so much to the organization and the community receiving that grant,” said Larry Bull, Bull Family Fund advisor and sponsor of the Arts and Culture category.

Planning is already underway for the 2019 Community Choice Awards. Stay tuned for more information, as we reveal new award categories, additional prizes and more opportunities to engage!

Continued...
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.

The Animals category was sponsored by the Staffworks Fund, established by Anita A. Vitullo in 2006 to support programs and services related to domestic animal welfare. More than $2.1 million in grants has been awarded to community organizations through the fund since 2009.

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.

The Arts & Culture category was sponsored by the Bull Family Fund, one of The Community Foundation’s most active donor-advised funds, having awarded nearly $300,000 in grants to nonprofit organizations and programs in Herkimer and Oneida counties. Since 2001, the fund has made 50 grants to benefit a diverse group of programs and organizations that work to address a broad spectrum of community needs in education, healthcare, arts and human services.
HEALTH & WELLNESS CATEGORY
Mid-York Library System

The Mid-York Library System improves and expands 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.

The Health & Wellness category was sponsored by the Mele Family Fund. Since 2009, the Mele Family Fund has awarded nearly $2.6 million in grants to nonprofit organizations that enrich the community in strategic and significant ways. The Mele family is passionate about supporting projects and programs that focus on creating long-term impact in areas of education and health.

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. 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.

The Human Services category was sponsored by the Ronald & Sheila Cuccaro Family Fund. Ronald and Sheila Cuccaro established their fund in 2006 and in the years since have granted $1.35 million to 30 local nonprofit organizations and programs. Through the fund, the Cuccaro’s focus their grantmaking in support of human service organizations and programs that help individuals struggling to meet basic needs.

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, as well as a primate play program for children, where youth will engage in fun physical activities to instill an appreciation of the movement of primates.

The Youth category was sponsored by the M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund. The fund was established in 2007 and has awarded more than 170 grants totaling over $2.5 million to support a variety of programs and organizations throughout Herkimer and Oneida counties. Over the years, many of these grants have focused on projects and programs that empower youth through education.
Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the nation. Unlike some other leading causes, suicide is indiscriminate and—most important—preventable.

Nationally, suicide rates have increased steadily over the past two decades. Locally, Herkimer County has experienced the effects of this public health crisis, with an overall suicide rate of 15.3 per 100,000 people—nearly double the statewide average. There has also been a significant rise in suicides among older adults in Herkimer County; the incidence rate among seniors over age 85 is 56 per 100,000 people—more than five times the state average.

In response, Catholic Charities of Herkimer County worked in collaboration with the already established and county-led Herkimer County Suicide Prevention Coalition to create the Herkimer County Suicide Prevention Program. The program seeks to raise awareness of suicide prevention and promote emotional wellness through education, training and resource development. Its efforts have a threefold focus: there are ways around suicide, ways to talk about the topic, and ways to intervene when appropriate.

In 2018, The Community Foundation provided $76,500 in startup funding for the program, allowing for the addition of a full-time suicide prevention services coordinator.

“The fact of the matter is, suicide is preventable, and lives can be saved,” said Michele Curtin, suicide prevention services coordinator. “With community education and awareness of suicide prevention and resources, it is possible to reduce suicide rates. There are many warning signs and risk factors, as well as resources available to help that many people aren’t aware of.”

The evidence-based program is taking a proactive and modern approach to educating and training on the topic of suicide by involving law enforcement, healthcare providers, schools and parents. A recent event, “Ryan’s Story,” at Herkimer Jr./Sr. High School gave students and parents the opportunity to hear one father’s story about his son’s suicide. The presentation helped spark conversation around critical topics, such as bullying, cyberbullying and social media.

To combat suicide rates among older adults, steps have been taken to implement a standardized survey to collect and analyze local data on the needs of rural senior residents. Through coalition efforts, funding has been secured and awarded to complete identified projects with a three-year suicide prevention grant from the Suicide Prevention Center of New York State.

Planned strategies include continued student-level prevention tasks, meetings and creation of “postvention” team training to reduce risk and promote healing for families after a suicide death.

Catholic Charities of Herkimer County, in conjunction with the Herkimer County Suicide Prevention Coalition, is committed to suicide prevention efforts for the long term, an effort that will involve continued education, monitoring and data collection in pursuit of measurable outcomes. Program partners are hopeful that suicide rates and other indicators will move in a more positive direction and, with data in hand, they will be able to make well-informed decisions on what the next steps for the program will be in the years to come.
For nearly five years, the doors to the Uptown Theatre remained closed, its marquee empty—literal and symbolic representations of the void created in the community by the shuttering of a once-thriving venue that anchored the South Utica neighborhood.

All that changed in 2017 when Uptown Theatre for Creative Arts (UTCA) was established, with a goal to offer diverse programming intended to inspire, educate, engage and entertain. Co-founders Devin and Briana Mahoney hope the theater will serve as a cultural, economic and social asset for the region and a catalyst for the revitalization of Utica’s Uptown neighborhood.

The reintroduction of the historic Uptown Theatre to the community as a regional entertainment destination, neighborhood anchor and economic stimulator is underway, with UTCA already offering classes in improv, sketch writing, stand-up and youth programming. The Mahoneys envision the Uptown Theatre becoming “the venue” for a dynamic range of constantly evolving programs, on stage and on screen, with multifunctional entertainment spaces.

UTCA developed a strategically phased renovation process, successfully completing phase one in 2018 with the creation of studio and classroom space, and the addition of an original mural on the south side of the Genesee Street landmark.

Since 2018, The Community Foundation has awarded UTCA $26,000, with support from the Dean and Eva Kelly Fund and the F.X. Matt II Memorial Fund, used primarily toward the cost of an energy-efficient heating system and renovations to the theater lobby, to make it a viable space for events, performances, workshops and community gatherings. In the past, the lobby served as a corridor to pass through on the way into the theater, but UTCA envisions it as a functioning multipurpose space with a unique appeal all its own.

Restoration and improvement of the main theater area will begin in the next phase of the project. UTCA plans to reopen the iconic main theater auditorium as a space for live performances and movie screenings, with a new emphasis on community involvement through collaborative classes.

“The Uptown means so much to so many people. I grew up seeing movies here. Everyone just wants to see the doors open again, and we see transforming the lobby as the way to make that happen as soon as possible,” said Devin Mahoney.

The excitement surrounding Utica’s recent revitalization has gained momentum over the past decade, pushed forward with the same community pride and innovative spirit that guided the city through its earlier periods of growth and development. Utica’s rebirth runs parallel to another movement, a homecoming of sorts—young people returning to their local roots after having lived in larger metropolitan areas, coming home to raise families and grow their careers.

Individuals like the Mahoneys, who returned to the region after living in Los Angeles for 15 years, are bringing new vitality and helping to reshape the city they want to live in, for the future.

“I notice with a lot of people in the area, there’s a lot of entrepreneurial energy and people really just make things happen,” said Briana Mahoney. “I think there’s a lot of great small businesses, a lot of change, and I think it’s because people take it upon themselves to do that. I think that inspired us to want to do this.”
“Impact Center:”

It’s a term that has dominated Community Foundation discussions for more than three years, as the Board of Trustees and staff moved from talking about a concept, to examining a potential reality. But for many, explaining the definition and the possibilities remains elusive.

What, then, is an impact center, generally, and what might such a center do for our community?

“I like to start any explanation with people in the community on this topic by asking: ‘Does everybody know what a community center is,’ and when heads begin to nod, I say; ‘Well, this is different,’” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation.

“For a lot of us, ‘community center’ in the past meant a place with recreational spaces—a gym, maybe a pool—and meeting rooms, but the impact center concept is much more than that.”

One of the reasons the concept is hard to describe definitively is the one-size-doesn’t-fit-all nature of impact centers. Since they’re tailored to meet the needs of specific communities and neighborhoods, their offerings vary widely. But as a concept, the impact center idea that The Community Foundation is exploring can be described as a multi-agency, multi-partner center that provides a range of services aimed at meeting the needs of a particular area, community or neighborhood.

“We began exploring this concept with our Trustees in 2016, and within a matter of months the discussion moved from generalities to some specific potential sites,” Dicks said. “The Board was intrigued by the idea of delivering services in a much more ‘impactful’ way than traditional grantmaking.”

Impact centers could benefit multiple communities across Herkimer and Oneida counties and The Community Foundation has been supporting several models in Sherrill, Old Forge and Herkimer, among others. In 2017, The Community Foundation collaborated with Herkimer County HealthNet in creating a feasibility study for an impact center in southern Herkimer County. During the same time, staff worked with the Town of Webb Health Center Fund to create a feasibility study for an impact center in the Town of Webb. Both studies showed high community interest in having a local impact center.
In Utica, Community Foundation Trustees and staff have made multiple visits to inner-city neighborhoods, walking the streets, talking with residents, elected officials, agency heads and advocates. As the largest population center in the two counties, Utica also presents the biggest challenges. As demonstrated by government and other source data, its Cornhill and West Utica neighborhoods—often described as “service deserts”—suffer from a full range of socioeconomic, housing, health and other societal ills.

“As we explored the concept through the lens of Utica, the idea that our first impact center could be a kind of pilot project for the area began to take hold,” Dicks said. “Success in the neighborhood of greatest need could provide a template for impact centers elsewhere in our two counties.”

After looking at several potential sites, The Community Foundation became aware in 2018 that the City of Utica had assumed ownership of part of the former Utica Free Academy (UFA). The prospect of returning a long-vacant building to life plus the structure’s great potential combined to move it to the top of the list.

“The vacant part of the old UFA is familiar to many in the neighborhood as the Cosmopolitan Center’s last location,” said Joe Wicks, Community Foundation special projects manager. “With three floors including a full gym, there’s plenty of space for an impact center, but the building has deteriorated somewhat since it fell into disuse.”

Encouraged by the former UFA’s potential, the Board of Trustees approved up to $100,000 to fund a feasibility study that will simultaneously explore the building’s physical challenges and limitations, as well as its suitability for an envisioned impact center, in partnership with the City of Utica and Oneida County. And the project’s next steps will be guided in great part by the feasibility study’s determinations.

“We’re excited, but we’re realistic,” Dicks said. “To make this happen, The Community Foundation is looking at leading a multiple-year commitment with many partners—city, county, neighborhood residents, nonprofits—we will lead this effort, but we’re not doing it alone. And that’s why we’re engaging with people who live near the building, as well as residents of the whole neighborhood. A successful impact center could help transform a part of the community, but only if residents feel like it’s their center.”
In 2018, the Village of Clinton was named 2018 “Kraft Hockeyville™ USA,” a title that captured the village’s 100-year history with the sport and the region’s passion for the game.

The distinction came about as the result of the Clinton Arena winning the fourth annual Kraft Hockeyville™ USA contest sponsored by the National Hockey League (NHL), NHL Players’ Association and Kraft Heinz. More than 4,000 ice rinks from across the country competed for the title, with the winner selected through a nationwide public vote.

“Clinton brought to life the essence of this program—both on the rink and off—and showed inspiring passion to rally their community,” said Michelle St. Jacques, former head of brand marketing and research & development for Kraft Heinz.

The arena, a local icon among the community’s spirited hockey fans, was awarded $150,000 in rink improvements as well as the opportunity to host a nationally televised, pre-season NHL game between the Buffalo Sabres and Columbus Blue Jackets in September 2018.

In preparation for the big game, initial arena improvements included the installation of new glass and netting to improve safety and audience visibility. These enhancements were just the beginning for the arena, which was built in the early 1950s after Clinton’s original indoor rink, home to the Clinton Comets, burned in 1953. Rebuilt in less than a year, the Clinton Arena is now proudly listed on the National Historic Register, and many of its original fixtures remain intact.

To build on the momentum created by the Hockeyville™ USA designation, the Town of Kirkland established the Clinton Arena Improvement Fund at The Community Foundation. The fund allows for charitable donations to be made in support of future enhancements.

The Community Foundation awarded the Town of Kirkland a $15,000 grant to perform a study that will help mold a plan for addressing the facility’s greatest needs, predicting the associated costs and providing a timeline for completion. The study, done by Nelson Associates of Clinton, establishes a potential $4 million project that, in phases, would renovate and expand the arena from top to bottom. Work includes a new weight room, the addition of a girls’ locker room and an expansion that opens up avenues for community use beyond skating.

Exciting things are ahead for this anchor of the Clinton community that many generations of hockey players, ice skaters, sports teams and families have lovingly referred to as their second home.
Our NEWEST funds

IN RECENT MONTHS, 10 FUNDS WERE ESTABLISHED AT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION THAT WILL BENEFIT RESIDENTS OF HERKIMER AND ONEIDA COUNTIES FOR YEARS TO COME.

CHRISTOPHER & KARI MAX FAMILY FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Christopher and Kari Max for general charitable purposes.

MAKE MUSIC HAPPEN PROJECT FUND
A designated fund created to support the Make Music Happen Project, a musical instrument lending program, in partnership with the New Hartford Public Library.

DR. RUSSELL & MAXINE RIDER CHARITABLE FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Dr. Russell and Mrs. Maxine Rider for general charitable purposes.

RISING PHOENIX FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Rising Phoenix Holdings Corporation to aid recovery efforts for natural disasters across the nation.

EDWARD G. HAYS AVIATION CAREER SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A scholarship fund established by Edward G. Hays to provide scholarships to students pursuing a career in aviation.

ROBERT L. STEFFENSEN FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Robert L. Steffensen for general charitable purposes.

EMPIRE RECYCLING FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Empire Recycling Corporation for general charitable purposes.

SCALZO, ZOGBY & WITTIG INSURANCE FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Scalzo, Zogby & Wittig, Inc. for general charitable purposes.

HUD-SON WARRIOR FUND
A donor-advised fund established by Dan and Jodi Hudon to support nonprofits that provide resources and aid to military veterans who have heroically served our country.

STEFFENSEN FUND
An agency fund established by the Oneida County History Center for expenses related to the digitization of its records and archives.
Most of us would like to leave our mark on the world so that, when we’re gone, our contributions to society live on—and, by extension, so do we.

Legacies come in many shapes, and a charitable legacy is perhaps the most selfless of all. It’s an investment with an infinite return, creating opportunities for others through everlasting generosity.

While many wish to witness the impact of their charitable giving while they are alive, Martin M. Martin preferred to do things his own way when it came to crafting his legacy. His generosity is proof that one person’s actions, even the most unexpected, can change a community for generations to come.

A long-time Town of Webb resident, Martin was born in 1928; like many Americans who grew up during the Great Depression, his childhood was shaped by plight and poverty. Martin and his brother often went without necessities, as their transient family sought better circumstances. With the family only able to afford an education for one child, Martin was fortunate to continue his studies after graduating high school, before serving as a military photographer in the Korean War. He’d always wanted to be a detective—a dream nearly realized by his more than 20 years with the New York State Police.

Many of the details of Martin’s life remain a mystery, just the way he wanted it. He disclosed little to his few acquaintances and family members. With artifacts and mementos from his estate, and through the memories and testimonials of the few who knew him, the tale of an idiosyncratic recluse unfolds.

A common recollection among those who knew him was Martin’s steadfast frugality. He wore frayed T-shirts, wouldn’t accept gifts, rode his bike around town to avoid buying gas and traveled for vacation just once in his 88 years.
True to his modest lifestyle, his home contained little furniture, just the essentials and a little room for his several pursuits, including an artist’s workshop and space to store several collections. Surrounded by the natural privacy of the Adirondacks, Martin seemed content with a simple, solitary lifestyle.

It likely surprised those who knew him that he had saved more than $1.2 million over his lifetime, with the intent that it would one day be used to help others.

Martin’s niece, Mary Jane Anderson, was one of the few to penetrate Martin’s hardened façade, checking in and caring for her aging uncle in his later years. Anderson knew of Martin’s consistent frugality, but it was only after his death that she discovered the extent of his investments.

Martin began planning his legacy when his health began to fail; after receiving a terminal prognosis, he lived for another four years. During that time, he witnessed growing divisions in society that solidified his desire to help future generations strive to do something positive with their lives and their careers.

Anderson recalled how the excellent care Martin received during his illness inspired conversations with nurses and medical students in the hospital. He wanted to know more about their careers and the education required to succeed. How much did it cost to earn a degree? How many years did they have to study to complete their schooling?

As someone with a strong work ethic, Martin recognized the dedication and sacrifice required to earn a degree and had a special appreciation for those who aspired to help others. This led to his decision to create a scholarship fund at The Community Foundation.

Martin’s neighbors and acquaintances likely remember him as somewhat aloof and thrifty, but Anderson hopes others will now be able to see her uncle in a different light.

“My uncle would want students to know that if they lead a clean life, give thought to their future, treat others with respect, and apply this to their careers, they’ll be successful,” she said. “I think he would want students to recognize how hard he had to work to help benefit them through this scholarship and to remember what some are willing to give up and to sacrifice so that the next generation can succeed.”

The largest scholarship fund ever established to benefit Town of Webb Union Free School District (UFSD), the Martin M. Martin Scholarship Fund will generate awards for every graduating senior planning to attend a two- or four-year college or university, beginning with the class of 2019. Additional awards for continuing education may be offered in future years, depending on funding availability.

“The Martin M. Martin Scholarship Fund is a game changer for our community and our school,” said Rex Germer, Town of Webb UFSD superintendent. “Students receiving this scholarship in its first year are grateful, and it’s going to be very interesting to see the impact as this grows. We’re excited to tell our elementary families about this opportunity to start looking ahead and planning. Because of the Martin M. Martin Scholarship Fund, college is an attainable goal for every student in our community now.”

“When I heard about the Martin M. Martin scholarships, I felt honored that a trooper in this community donated his entire savings to our school,” said senior Eian Newton. “Martin is a hero to me now. I want to thank him for this generous gift, for his service as a trooper and everything he accomplished in his lifetime to help others.”
HOW TO GIVE

ONLINE
foundationhoc.org

MAIL
2608 Genesee Street | Utica, NY 13502

PHONE
315.735.8212

WAYS TO GIVE

MAKE A GIFT
- Cash
- Real Estate
- Stocks & Securities

CREATE A FUND
- Donor-Advised
- Scholarship
- Field-of-Interest

PLAN YOUR LEGACY
- Bequests
- 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.

Connect WITH US!
The Staffworks Save A Life Campaign annual matching gift program doubled community donations, up to $10,000 per organization, to regional animal welfare agencies in 2018. Community members donated more than $465,000, securing over $215,000 in matching funds and bonus awards from the Staffworks Fund. In total, the campaign generated more than $680,000 in support for the 18 participating organizations!

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COMMUNITY FOUNDATION STAFF
PLAYING CITY OF UTICA MONOPOLY

STUDENT SHADOWING AT THE
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

GO RED FOR
WOMEN DAY

GRADY’S WAY
RIBBON CUTTING

I LOVE MY COMMUNITY READING DAY AT
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION STAFF
PLAYING CITY OF UTICA MONOPOLY

BOILERMAKER KIDS
TRAINING PROGRAM

BOILERMAKER KIDS
TRAINING PROGRAM

GRADY’S WAY
RIBBON CUTTING
WE ARE DEDICATED TO CREATING A VIBRANT REGION WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.