IMAGES OF impact
Good things are happening. And The Community Foundation is helping lead the way.

I’m pleased to share with you the latest edition of our newsletter, which summarizes our recent leadership efforts and investments in the community. As 2017 draws to a close, The Community Foundation’s work manifests itself in myriad ways.

Among other items, this issue highlights our unprecedented coordination and delivery of flood recovery funding from public and private sources, and the marshaling of public support for Mohawk Valley Health System’s new integrated healthcare campus. Also in these pages, you’ll find updates on our investments in The Root Farm, Arc Herkimer and The Community Foundation’s own Downtown Startup Challenge—now in its second year.

From the proven impact of well-established funds to the promise of newly opened ones, our donors’ sophisticated philanthropy has enhanced and will continue to transform our community for generations to come.

Please take a moment to read through this issue, and take pride in what you and like-minded community supporters have made possible. Through The Community Foundation, our area continues to invest in itself—and the results are all around us.

Sincerely,

Alicia Dicks
President/CEO
True to its recently announced “Dream Big” master plan, the Utica Zoo is moving forward on several projects that will enhance its services and habitats for years to come. As a long-time Zoo partner, The Community Foundation led the way on support for two of the organization’s recent major projects.

First, in 2015, the Zoo renovated its animal quarantine, as well as its infirmary and animal holding center. And last year, a primate campaign was launched to replace a century-old facility with a more natural habitat for the Zoo’s gibbons, spider monkeys, tamarins and tegus. The Community Foundation’s investment in these projects totaled more than $200,000, including support from the Ronald & Sheila Cuccaro Family Fund.

The Utica Zoo is prized by many of The Community Foundation’s donors, especially Joan M. Sinnott, creator of the Sinnott Endowment Fund for the Utica Zoo. Her generosity is helping the Zoo build financial self-sufficiency, allowing it to remain a community treasure enjoyed by future generations.

Here’s a look at some of the other exciting projects our donor-advised funds have helped to support at the Utica Zoo.
Zebras are an important part of many zoos, especially the Utica Zoo, whose logo features the black-and-white animal. Two Hartmann’s Mountain Zebras call the Utica Zoo home; the father and son arrived from the San Diego Safari Park in 2013. A grant from the Abigail J. Freitag Memorial Fund will help the Utica Zoo care for the zebras—Abigail’s favorite animal. Abigail passed away at the age of 4 after a year-long battle with cancer.

Safari STROLLERS

Lillian “Duff” Matt recalls living near the Utica Zoo and taking walks with her children to visit the animals. As most parents can attest, having a second (or third) set of hands can sometimes be helpful. To assist families, the F.X. Matt II Memorial Fund awarded a grant to the Utica Zoo for two new safari strollers. The two-seaters make it easier and more enjoyable to cruise around the Zoo with little ones.

Donovan THE LION

Named in memory of the long-time New York State Senate leader, 6-year-old Donovan the lion (pictured with the senator’s son) is cared for through the generosity of a multi-year grant from the Senator James H. Donovan Memorial Fund. Senator Donovan obtained state funding to establish the Utica Zoo’s Siberian Tiger exhibit, which was converted in 2011 to accommodate all big cats, a fitting home for Donovan the lion and his friends.

Summer INTERNSHIPS

The Give Back to Utica Fund was created by former Utica resident Steven H. Oram to focus on creating internship opportunities for local students. In its fourth year, the fund has paid for summer interns to be placed with the Utica Zoo, among other places, to support marketing and administrative activities.
The Community Foundation is making an impact in all corners of our community through unique and innovative partnerships.

**BOILERMAKER ROAD RACE**
$8,300
Funding to create a community gathering space at the site of the Boilermaker Urban Garden on Sunset Avenue, providing residents in the West Utica neighborhood direct access to the Boilermaker Public Market.

**MOHAWK VALLEY EDGE**
$25,000
An investment in the Commercialization Academy, which provides start-up businesses with technical assistance and seed funding to accelerate high-tech industry and entrepreneurship in the Mohawk Valley.

**SUNY POLY FOUNDATION**
$15,000
A partnership of The Community Foundation and M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund to support FIRST, a year-round program for K-12 students that engages students in robotics, computer programming, problem-solving and a broad range of STEM topics.

**BOONVILLE LITTLE LEAGUE ASSOCIATION**
$10,000
Support for three new playing fields to accommodate the more than 300 children of all ages in northern Oneida and Herkimer counties who participate in Boonville’s Little League program.

**REGIONAL PRIMARY CARE NETWORK**
$100,000
An investment in the expansion of Valley Family Health Center in Ilion to improve access to prenatal care and behavioral health services for Herkimer County residents.

**THE PARKWAY CENTER**
$29,900
Funding for a new vehicle that will allow volunteers to provide transportation to seniors for non-emergency medical appointments.

**CITY OF ROME**
$43,200
Funding for the construction of a new pavilion at Haselton Wright Park, Rome’s most utilized public park, that will include restroom facilities and storage.

**SCULPTURE SPACE**
$25,000
Support for a new program that connects undergraduate art students with professional sculptors during college semester breaks to work on comprehensive sculpting projects.

**THEA BOWMAN HOUSE**
$30,000
Support from the Utica National Group Foundation Fund and the Margarets Gaffney & Van Waes Fund to provide child care assistance services to low-income single parents while they attend college or professional development programs.

**EAST CANADA VALLEY VISION**
$33,900
A partnership of The Community Foundation and the M&T Bank/Partners Trust Bank Charitable Fund for the Dolgeville Fun + Fitness Area, an expansion of the Dolgeville village playground, incorporating “smart” fitness stations and safe playscapes for residents of all ages.

**ST. JOSEPH & ST. PATRICK CHURCH**
$1,000
Support from the Alexandra G. Kogut Memorial Fund and Beatrice Cavaretta Faga and Maryellen Faga Kieffer Fund to purchase tables, chairs and essential kitchen equipment for Mother Marianne’s Westside Kitchen, which serves nutritious meals to youth and those in need.

**YMCA OF THE GREATER TRI-VALLEY**
$15,350
Funding for new aquatic bikes to expand existing spinning programs and develop new wellness classes at the Y’s Rome facility.
GETTING TO KNOW OUR Neighbors

Throughout the year, The Community Foundation makes hundreds of community investments to improve our region’s quality of life. These decisions are based on data of all types, ranging from census figures to performance outcomes, but we take the process one step further. To gain first-hand knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of community needs, Community Foundation staff and Trustees have engaged in multiple neighborhood walks with advocates, leaders and residents.
Picture this: You’re hungry, tired, just getting home from work. You open up your fridge, and a delicious, nutritious, perfectly balanced, well-prepared meal awaits.

Sound good? Ready to buy a meal? Then you’re in luck! Hundreds gathered to watch on October 4 as The Community Foundation awarded $30,000 to The Balanced Chef, winner of this year’s Downtown Startup Challenge.

Three finalists pitched ideas for innovative business concepts to a panel of judges at the thINCubator gathering. The Balanced Chef contended with Main Street Market—a coffee shop, craft product emporium and brewpub in Rome—and Utica Brewing Company—a family-friendly brewpub featuring high-quality craft beer.

In its second year, the Downtown Startup Challenge was open to start-ups and early-stage businesses looking to open a storefront location in downtown Utica or Rome. Participation in the Challenge nearly doubled from 2016, with two-thirds of this year’s 90 applicants accepted to participate in the five-month program. Participants were coached and mentored by Mohawk Valley Community College’s thINCubator, which offers accelerated development and deployment programming for aspiring entrepreneurs.

“The Community Foundation is committed to encouraging our area’s emerging entrepreneurial culture through the Downtown Startup Challenge,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation.
Entrepreneurs like The Balanced Chef are a growing part of a grassroots economic development resurgence in our region, and we’re thrilled that they, and all those who participated in the Challenge, will add to the vibrancy and success of our area’s urban centers.

The Balanced Chef offers fully prepared, fresh, “never-frozen” meals individually portioned and packaged. Currently, customers can order online and meals are delivered to homes and local businesses. Executive Chef Brian Donovan says he and partner Matthew LaBella are eager to transition the company from its current internet-only model to a successful storefront operation in downtown Utica.

“We’re very excited to be moving our plan forward, thanks to the support from The Community Foundation and its Corporate Partners,” Donovan said. “The Challenge has been a great way for us and others in the community to get inspiration and support that encourages entrepreneurship. We genuinely want to contribute to this movement; it’s something that’s really making a difference to our entire area.”

The Downtown Startup Challenge was made possible through the generosity of The Community Foundation’s Corporate Partners.
In the first half of 2017, 10 new funds were established at The Community Foundation that will benefit residents of Herkimer and Oneida counties for years to come.

**CAP-21 FRIENDS OF MIRNIE – WOODLANDS WALKWAY PROJECT FUND**
An agency fund established to accept charitable contributions that will support the construction of the Woodland Walkway at View in Old Forge, a project dedicated to Hank and Mirnie Kashiwa.

**CORCORAN-BUCZKOWSKI FUND**
A donor-advised fund that provides general charitable support, with a focus on programs and services that support individuals of all ages with developmental disabilities.

**FRIENDS OF JOHNSON PARK CENTER EDUCATION FUND**
A designated fund, created by an anonymous donor, that exclusively benefits the educational programs offered by Johnson Park Center in Utica.

**FRIENDS OF ONEIDA COUNTY YOUTH BUREAU FUND**
An agency fund established to promote philanthropic support for the enhancement and creation of youth programs provided by the Oneida County Youth Bureau.

**GARY AND KAREN CZERKIES MEMORIAL FUND**
A future designated fund that will be established through the Estate of Gary and Karen Czerkies to provide annual grants and scholarships to several predetermined nonprofit agencies.

**KEVIN NEENAN – CLASS OF 1978 SCHOLARSHIP FUND**
Established with funds raised by Kevin’s family and friends, this memorial scholarship will be awarded to graduates of New Hartford High School who demonstrate unrealized potential, inspiring them to believe in themselves by virtue of the nominating committee’s belief in them.

**KRISTIN’S FUND**
A fiscal sponsorship that accepts charitable contributions on behalf of Kristin’s Fund, established in memory of Kristin Palumbo Longo, to support programs and educational initiatives that increase awareness of domestic violence and prevention tactics.

**MARTIN M. MARTIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND**
A scholarship fund created through a bequest from the Estate of Martin M. Martin that provides scholarships for graduating and non-traditional students from the Town of Webb.

**ONEIDA COUNTY HISTORY CENTER SESQUICENTENNIAL FUND**
An agency fund created to promote charitable support of the Oneida County History Center in recognition of its upcoming 150th anniversary celebration.

**ROBERT AND SADIEANN SPEAR FAMILY FUND**
A donor-advised fund established to provide general charitable support through grantmaking to nonprofit organizations.
The devastation caused by flooding lasts months—sometimes even years—afer the rain stops falling. Thousands in our region were impacted as record rainfall inundated local waterways in early July. First responders and local officials worked around the clock, providing immediate relief in the form of food and safe shelter. As the waters receded, the focus shifted to recovery and remediation.

Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr. committed $2.75 million to recovery efforts, including $250,000 in direct assistance to individuals. The Sauquoit Valley Foundation and Sauquoit Valley Optimist Club also committed funds, as well as the Village of Whitesboro with a promise to allocate up to $125,000. The Community Foundation was asked to take the lead in coordinating the intake process for requests, forming the Unmet Needs Program. Led by a committee consisting of representatives from The Community Foundation, Oneida County, Catholic Charities Oneida/Madison County, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Mohawk Valley Housing and Homeless Coalition, and the United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica Area’s 211 Mid-York, the Unmet Needs Program has received more than 240 inquiries for assistance. As of late October, the committee has awarded nearly $170,000 to 106 families, with another 56 households eligible for funding pending additional information.

In addition to leading this program, The Community Foundation partnered with National Grid to reimburse homeowners for the utility inspection needed to restore power to flooded homes. The Community Foundation also matched donations made to the Mohawk Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross that were designated to relief efforts, helping the chapter to raise more than $49,750 in total.

“In the wake of this summer’s flooding, our community’s strength and solidarity shined through as neighbors helped one another,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “Should our community face a challenge of this magnitude again, I am confident that the recovery model created and implemented by The Community Foundation will help to expedite support and assistance to all those affected.”
What began with a vision, conceived by Arc Herkimer’s leadership on an afternoon stroll through a nearby empty field, is now a one-of-a-kind, fully-accessible recreation facility where individuals of all ages and abilities are welcome.

As the Arc Park project gained momentum, Arc Herkimer approached its long-time partner The Community Foundation for support. To rally additional resources and funding, The Community Foundation agreed to match up to $80,000 in donations if Arc Herkimer could raise $250,000.

“The Community Foundation continued to support the project as we learned more about what it would take financially to make this happen,” said Frank Reid, Arc Herkimer’s vice president for strategic development. “Altogether, the Foundation contributed over $230,000 to this $1.5 million park. Without the Foundation’s support, we would never have been able to make this happen.”
“This has the potential to go beyond the Village of Herkimer and Herkimer County,” said Reid. “Because 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 elsewhere. That’s really the long-range vision for this park—to become a destination that will bring people together from all over.”

In addition to The Community Foundation’s discretionary awards, six donor-advised funds supported the project, including:

• A. Richard Cohen Family Fund
• Albert S. Mazloom Family Fund
• Bull Family Fund
• Hummel Family Fund
• J.K. & Hedy Anne Hage Family Fund
• M&T Bank/Partner’s Trust Bank Charitable Fund
I remember sitting in Alicia’s office last year when she first played a song for me on her phone. She had heard it on the radio while on vacation, and she said its lyrics resonated with her and the new work we’re doing at The Community Foundation.

The prelude was slow, quietly building up to a crescendo. With the guitar came a quicker beat, one you couldn’t help but tap along to. Starting with the first line, “To be humble, to be kind,” it was easy to see what drew Alicia to the song—a powerful message and a catchy tune, and all in just 3 minutes and 22 seconds. I was convinced we needed to find a way to incorporate this inspiring song into a project. A social media video, perhaps? “What about our next TV commercial?” Alicia suggested.

A quick Google search revealed the song had been used during opening ceremonies at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, and featured on CBS’s “NCIS.” I wondered if we’d be able to obtain the rights to use the song for a local production.

Our marketing intern at the time was up for the challenge. She emailed every address she could find for the Connecticut-based band, “The Alternate Routes,” and its management. No response. She called every phone number listed. No answer. The band was scheduled to play a show in Saratoga Springs, and she was prepared to drive out to ask them in person, if necessary.

Finally, she made contact with one of the band’s representatives with the help of a local event promoter, and the answer was surprisingly simple—yes!

The project came full circle many months later when The Alternate Routes played at the Levitt AMP Utica Music Series at Kopernik Park in August.

The crowd eagerly awaited “Nothing More,” now well-known in our community, thanks to The Community Foundation’s TV ad and online video. The sun had already set before the familiar prelude began to fill the park, and I stepped away from the crowd to take it all in…the performance, the lyrics, the expressions on people’s faces…and in that moment, I knew for sure that endless possibilities do exist.
In June, The Community Foundation presented the Community Impact Award to Sitrin Health Care Center. The award honors nonprofit organizations that serve Herkimer and Oneida counties and show outstanding achievement in the charitable sector.

Sitrin provides a wide array of services ranging from comprehensive medical rehabilitation and skilled nursing to dental services, child care and medically affiliated adult day health care. With a mission that emphasizes finding innovative solutions to meet the needs of those it serves, Sitrin has a long history of being the first in the area to offer in-demand programs and services.

The Community Foundation has awarded more than $750,000 in grants to Sitrin since our partnership first began in the late 1980s. True to its mission, Sitrin used many of the grants as start-up funding for the development or expansion of new and unique programs.

Sitrin’s most recent endeavor, the creation of a NeuroCare Program, was funded with the help of a $100,000 Community Foundation grant in 2015. The NeuroCare Program is the first and only long-term care program of its kind in Upstate New York for individuals with Huntington’s Disease and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Sitrin renovated an underutilized nursing unit, transforming it into a 32-bed long-term care program that created more than 40 new jobs.

More than a decade earlier, Sitrin created STARS (Success Through Adaptive Recreation and Sports), an innovative adaptive sports program that provides individuals with physical disabilities the opportunity to engage in sports on a recreational and competitive basis. This program works closely with the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) and Upstate Cerebral Palsy, allowing clients of all three organizations to participate.

“As the needs of our community evolve, so too must the services and programs offered by our nonprofit partners,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “Sitrin has an unparalleled history of embracing innovation to meet these everchanging needs. The Community Impact Award is a testament to the organization’s pioneering spirit and dedication to our community.”
A trip to The Root Farm evokes a sense of inspiration for visitors. Spanning over 100 acres in Sauquoit, the complex includes an equine-assisted therapy center and ever-expanding vocational and recreational programs.

“The name of The Root Farm comes from our founder, Alice Root, but really has so many more meanings,” said Executive Director Jeremy Earl. “When you think about roots, they’re the foundation from which things grow and The Root Farm is creating transformative opportunities from which people can grow and expand to become the best that they can be.”

The Root Farm horticulture expansion project is one such opportunity, an example of the kind of life-enriching programs being cultivated at the innovative complex. The multi-faceted project aims to enhance the organization’s agricultural programs and create integrated employment opportunities for those that typically face barriers to employment. The plan included the addition of a traditional greenhouse and two hydroponic Freight Farms, making The Root Farm one of only a handful of farmers in New York state utilizing this technology to grow produce.

As a supporting partner, The Community Foundation awarded $100,000 in funding to make this innovative expansion come to life. Built entirely inside a shipping container, Freight Farms are a complete hydroponic growing system that make it possible to grow fresh lettuce and herbs year-round.

“One of the unique features about the Freight Farm technology is that it is an extremely efficient system,” said Earl. “We’re able to grow over 400 heads of lettuce at any given time. In Central New York, it’s difficult or impossible to grow produce year-round because of the weather conditions. We will be able to provide locally grown, fresh produce to local establishments.”

The Root Farm has a track record of efficiency. Recognizing a shared vision to provide care to people of all ages and abilities, The Root Farm became an affiliate of Upstate Cerebral Palsy in 2014. This partnership provided the nonprofit organization with additional resources, allowing for greater focus on learning and healing through the power of equine, agricultural and recreational experiences. The Root Farm has thrived in large part due to the organization’s ability to adapt.

Critical to nonprofit sustainability is the need to think creatively about funding sources. The Community Foundation, as stewards of donor generosity, must consider the long-term viability of proposed projects in order to make the most impactful community investments. Many nonprofits like The Root Farm are exploring the merits of operating social enterprises, a model that aims to reduce a nonprofit organization’s reliance on support from traditional funding streams. By employing revenue generating strategies, often in the form of products and services that are in line with their core mission, nonprofits become more resilient to changes in funding over the long term.

In more ways than one, The Root Farm’s fresh approach provides a rich foundation that inspires vertical growth.
The Community Foundation recently funded a nutritional education program for seniors in conjunction with The Root Farm and Herkimer County HealthNet. The participatory class encourages individuals to maintain a healthy diet, inspiring them to buy local produce. Using fresh vegetables from The Root Farm gardens, seniors gained the tools and confidence needed to continue cooking and eating healthy at home.
From the pages of the Observer-Dispatch to the halls of city and county government, The Community Foundation in recent months made clear its continued support of the Mohawk Valley Health System’s new downtown Utica hospital project.

“The Community Foundation, as an organization, decided to express its support for the new hospital because we believe that it’s in the best interest of this community’s future,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation, speaking of the O-D guest column published on August 20.

Dicks said The Community Foundation’s position was the result of many months of discussion, including a July Board of Trustees gathering, and the published statement was reviewed by the Board and formally approved by its Executive Committee. The decision to publish a formal position of support was prompted by the O-D’s editorial query, published on August 15: “This community needs to get its act together. That requires strong leadership. Where is it?”

In response, The Community Foundation committed “to provide that leadership . . . [and] on behalf of the entire community, engage, convene, inform, guide; and fund appropriate next steps to support our hospital.”

Further steps were taken to affirm The Community Foundation’s stance when Trustee Robert Umidi appeared before meetings of the Utica Common Council and the Oneida County Board of Legislators.

“The new hospital is the single largest public-private investment in this area’s healthcare, and its future quality of life, in history,” Umidi told lawmakers. “The Community Foundation’s only interest in this issue is to fulfill our mission—to invest in our community, build a better quality of life and increase opportunity for all. And to that end, on behalf of our president and CEO, the Board of Trustees and the many donors who have invested in our community, I ask that you support any and all measures necessary to advance the building of a state-of-the-art hospital in downtown Utica.”

Umidi was interviewed by Spectrum News following his statement to the Utica council, and Trustee Michael Fitzgerald appeared on the WIBX radio show “First News with Keeler in the Morning” on September 8. Dicks says speaking out on community issues is an important part of The Community Foundation’s role in leading and supporting positive change.

“Our Trustees have made it clear that this is a critical issue for our area’s future,” Dicks said. “To fulfill its mission, The Community Foundation has an obligation to advance transformational projects and initiatives of this magnitude. We look forward to the hospital’s continued progress, in tandem with the evolving renaissance in downtown Utica and other communities across our region.”
Reduced government funding. Increased competition for donations. Rising costs. These are just a few of the challenges our nonprofit partners face as they look to the future.

Recognizing there is strength in numbers, the boards for The Peacemaker Program and the Women’s Employment Resource Center (WERC) began discussing the possibility of a partnership in 2016. With missions that promote self-determination and empowerment of their clients, the organizations believed strengthening ties would be of mutual benefit. They approached The Community Foundation to help facilitate initial discussions and sought guidance on options available to them.

In the months that followed, The Community Foundation continued to assist the organizations, engaging the New York Council on Nonprofits (NYCON) as a consultant and awarding funds to cover merger-related expenses.

“As the nonprofit landscape continues to change, it’s essential for organizations to find new and innovative ways to collaborate for success. The Community Foundation is uniquely positioned to help our nonprofit partners explore these opportunities because we favor what’s in the best interest of our community and its residents,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation.

In October 2017, the two organizations announced their merger and new name, Empowered Pathways. The merger allows the new organization to build capacity, consolidate administrative services, decrease overhead and increase funding opportunities.

“The mission of empowering people to take control of their situations and forge their own path forward aligned perfectly, along with the size and needs of each organization,” said Stephanie Eghigian, executive director of Empowered Pathways. “Together, we will be stronger and poised to increase opportunity, capacity, stability and resources such as training and programming for our staff and clients.”
To the north of Herkimer and Oneida counties, the Adirondack Mountain region—the largest tract of wilderness east of the Mississippi—inspires a sense of natural wonderment amidst dense forests, glistening lakes and panoramic mountain top views.

Anne LaBastille, award-winning author, impassioned conservationist and courageous advocate for the environment, spent much of her life writing and exploring, deep in this wilderness.

Experiencing this intact environment increased her passion to protect it. Taken with the idea of preserving the forest, from both ecological and societal standpoints, LaBastille enrolled in the natural resource program at Cornell University. There she was the first female student to study wildlife ecology, later becoming Cornell’s first female professor of natural resources.

LaBastille built her name and reputation through environmental advocacy on issues such as acid rain, climate change and the need for conservation long before they were widely held ideas.

She authored over 150 popular articles and 25 scientific articles, emerging on the scene at the crossroads of the feminist and environmental movements.

In 1965, LaBastille purchased property on Twitchell Lake in the Western Adirondacks and built a log cabin she called “West of the Wind.” Her home, only accessible by lake or trail, lacked modern amenities, providing peace and solitude as she concentrated on her writing. It was here that she authored her best known, four-volume “Woodswoman” book series.

LaBastille met long-time friend Leslie Surprenant on a cold winter’s night near Eagle Bay. Surprenant, who was only 12-years-old at the time, had struck ice on her snowmobile, shattering the windshield. LaBastille happened across her and invited the shivering Surprenant to warm up in the cab of her beat-up pickup truck alongside her beloved German Shepherd.

Surprenant, now retired from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, always knew she wanted to work in the field. Growing up not far from LaBastille’s cabin, Surprenant had heard about the “Woodswoman’s” work and when she attended college in Syracuse, she began writing letters to LaBastille. The pair kept in touch, LaBastille encouraging Surprenant’s interest in the environment even during her busiest stretches of writing, traveling, consulting, lecturing and teaching.
After college, Surprenant worked in Old Forge as a wilderness ranger. The two friends crossed paths again; their friendship developing over the years through professional collaboration and as trail mates exploring the Adirondacks. Surprenant knew this was the friendship of "two rock-solid Adirondack-ers" but she never imagined she'd fall into step as the executrix of her good friend’s estate.

When LaBastille died in 2011, her simple backwoods lifestyle allowed her the opportunity to give back. LaBastille’s wishes were documented in her will; she wanted to support female conservation students, make a meaningful contribution to writers, preserve her cabin and start a nonprofit foundation. As Surprenant sorted through the directives LaBastille left in her will, it became clear that she’d have to get creative to deliver the intent of her friend’s wishes. She quickly discovered creating a nonprofit foundation wouldn’t be feasible, leading her to explore the benefits of having an established organization act as a conduit for the funds. From this, her partnership with The Community Foundation began.

Surprenant established the Anne LaBastille Memorial Fund for Writers to benefit the Adirondack Center for Writing through the initial estate investment and a royalty agreement from LaBastille’s intellectual properties. A second fund, the Anne LaBastille Pack Basket Fund for Writers, was also established, named for “pack baskets” used by hikers on a trail. This made it possible to allocate money to establish a writer’s residency.

Surprenant worked with the Adirondack Center for Writing in Saranac Lake to establish a permanent writer’s residency. Now in its fourth year, the well-known and competitive program receives applications from around the world. Six writers are chosen annually for the two-week residency at a lodge on Twitchell Lake, the site of LaBastille’s cabin. The program is a unique opportunity for writers in all genres to focus on their work and collaborate with other writers, while exploring and reflecting on the beauty of the Adirondack wilderness that surrounds them.

Delivering on another of LaBastille’s wishes, to maintain and conserve her famous log cabin, Surprenant facilitated “West of the Winds” move to the Adirondack Experience Museum on Blue Mountain Lake. The cabin was reconstructed and is on exhibit along with a collection of LaBastille’s writings and rustic belongings. Surprenant was also instrumental in establishing an annual scholarship program for women in science at Cornell University.

Carrying out her duties as executrix was complicated at times, but Surprenant says she’s proud of what she accomplished and has gained insights she hopes others will benefit from.

“When Anne got her mind on something, no amount of persuasion could change her position; she was headstrong,” Surprenant recalled. “If you have the means to do so, I’d recommend getting these things together while you’re still alive, so that you’re able to see the fruits of your vision and your effort. One of the saddest things is that Anne didn’t get to see her legacy.”

In some ways, LaBastille foreshadowed her vision of an enduring legacy through her work, as described in the epilogue of volume one of the “Woodswoman” series:

“Life seems to have no beginning and no ending. Only the steady expansion of trunk and root, the slow pileup of duff and debris, the lap of water before it becomes ice, the patter of raindrops before they turn to snowflakes. Then the chirp of a swallow winging over the lake reminds me that... there is always a new beginning.”
Connect WITH US!

Our friends at The Neighborhood Center made us a special thank you “quilt” for reading to them each month. For more of the daily moments that take place at The Community Foundation, follow us on social media.

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WE ARE DEDICATED TO CREATING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE GOAL OF MAKING SOCIAL IMPACT IN OUR COMMUNITY.