a magazine for friends of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation

HER together

Partner foundations enhance well-being of entire region

Greater Milwaukee FOUNDATION greater together

Lifestrider



Volume 10 Issue 1 July 2025

GREATER

A MAGAZINE FOR FRIENDS OF THE GREATER MILWAUKEE FOUNDATION VOLUME 10 :: ISSUE 1 _:: JULY 2025

VISION Greater Milwaukee becomes a vibrant, economically thriving region comprised of welcoming and inclusive communities that provide opportunity, prosperity and a high quality of life for all.

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ON THE COVER:



A LifeStriders client participates in an equine therapy session. The Waukesha nonprofit provides integrative and nature-based therapies to individuals with physical, emotional and cognitive special needs.

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Greater Milwaukee Foundation President and CEO Greg Wesley joins in on the celebration of the Greater Cedarburg Foundation's 25th anniversary in May. Photo credit: Mark Justesen

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our region is a tapestry of distinct communities, each with its own inherent value, unique identity and specific priorities. Yet the more we connect with one another in shared interest, the more we thrive.

Philanthropy demonstrates how we collectively benefit from joining together the fabric of our neighborhoods, cities and counties. And for 110 years, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation has provided a common thread for those who love their community.

For this issue of Greater Together, we talked to some of the donors, volunteer leaders and visionary founders of our partner foundations, which are dedicated to enhancing specific communities and geographic areas within our region. Like the places they serve, they each have unique histories and characteristics – but they all avow that partnering with the Foundation allows them to have a greater philanthropic impact than they would alone.

The benefits of these deep relationships are many and mutual. Our partner foundations each has its own governing board that makes independent grant decisions. But because their work is led by volunteers, we lend our staff's expertise, in administration and asset investment as well as strategic counsel. This allows us to learn together, and potentially gather resources together where interests are aligned, while also addressing each community's diverse needs.

No one knows their communities better, so by supporting the Cream City Foundation, Greater Cedarburg Foundation, Oconomowoc Area Foundation and West Bend Community Foundation, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, too, is having a greater impact than we could alone.

I am tremendously grateful for the generosity of donors who created and continue to sustain these foundations, as well as the nonprofits who improve the lives of local residents daily through the support they, in turn, receive.

Our region is greater than the sum of its parts because we choose to work together.

Gregory M. Wesley, J.D. President & CEO Greater Milwaukee Foundation

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Rooted in community

Foundation's extended family helps region thrive

Philanthropy done together is done best. Through our partner foundations in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation helps donors make the greatest impact where they live, work and care most.

The Cream City Foundation, Greater Cedarburg Foundation, Oconomowoc Area Foundation and West Bend Community Foundation are each led by a volunteer board — local leaders who understand their community's unique needs and strengths and give of their time and talent to help move their community forward. While these foundations, also known as supporting organizations, focus on directing grants to vital local initiatives, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation provides administrative support, donor services, investment expertise, communications and program guidance to ensure that every gift goes even further.

This collaborative approach not only strengthens individual communities but also enhances the well-being of the entire greater Milwaukee region, creating a more connected, resilient, economically attractive and thriving future for all.







PARTNER **FOUNDATIONS BY THE NUMBERS**

Our four partner foundations each represents a specific geographic area or demographic group.

MILWAUKEE COUNTY Cream City Foundation \$1.8M in assets

WASHINGTON COUNTY West Bend Community Foundation \$83.6M in assets

> **WAUKESHA COUNTY Oconomowoc Area Foundation** \$14.2M in assets

> **OZAUKEE COUNTY Greater Cedarburg Foundation** \$8.5M in assets

To learn more about supporting organizations, visit our website: bit.ly/what-is-a-supporting-organization

July 2025 GREATER together

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MILWAUKEE COUNTY Rainbow sidewalks near Cathedral Square Park

OZAUKEE COUNTY

Cedarburg Mill

WASHINGTON COUNTY Kettle Moraine YMCA Discovery Center



Fowler Lake Boardwalk



Cream City Foundation Foundation's next chapter begins with a powerful new partnership

> Bystanders at a recent Milwaukee Pride parade, an annual event that takes place in Milwaukee's Walker's Point and celebrates the LGBTQ+ communities in southeastern Wisconsin.

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CREAM CITY FOUNDATION

Were it not for the support of the Cream City Foundation, hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth in southeastern Wisconsin would remain homeless; the stories of Milwaukee and Wisconsin's LGBTQ+ history and heritage would be forever lost; Milwaukee would not have a festival to celebrate the LGBTQ+ communities and their culture; and one of the country's leading providers of HIV care, treatment and prevention would not exist.

"It's a name that has a legacy," said Charlie Nash, CCF's board chair.

As one of the oldest LGBTQ+-focused foundations in the country, CCF has mobilized resources for over 40 years to address the myriad challenges the community in southeastern Wisconsin has faced, from the AIDS epidemic to the fight for marriage equality. In doing so, it has helped advance the community's health, equity and prosperity.

A new partnership with the Greater Milwaukee Foundation is ensuring CCF will thrive in perpetuity to address whatever new set of needs and challenges may arise. In 2024, CCF joined the Foundation as a partner foundation, structured as a supporting organization. That relationship allows it to maintain an independent board and decision-making power while benefiting from the Foundation's investment expertise, administrative support and deep community ties.

"Philanthropy is most effective when it is inclusive and collaborative," said Greg Wesley, Foundation president and CEO. "For decades, the Cream City Foundation has served the community with purpose. Now, thanks to their leadership's trust in our partnership, we have the privilege of co-authoring a new chapter in this story of indelible impact, bringing us closer to a thriving Milwaukee for all." Rainbow crosswalks at Jefferson and Wells streets near Cathedral Square Park in Milwaukee. The park is where the first LGBTQ+ parade in Milwaukee ended.

> Started in 1982 with \$500 in seed money, CCF has built up the capacity of many LGBTQ+serving agencies over the years through financial support and fiscal sponsorship. Entities such as the Wisconsin LGBTQ+ History Project, the state's largest digital collection of historical LGBTQ+ media, and Out Families, an organization that seeks to support and connect LGBTQ+ headed families.

CCF also has provided more than \$1.6 million in grants to organizations, including Milwaukee Pride, Pathfinders and Vivent Health. It gave the first \$500 to create Milwaukee's PrideFest in 1988 and helped pull the organization out of bankruptcy in 2003. In 1991, CCF provided startup funds for Vivent Health's HIV prevention work.

The foundation was a critical catalyst in founding Q-BLOK, Pathfinder's housing program for LGBTQ+ and allied young people ages 17 to 25. Sixteen years ago, CCF commissioned a study on youth homelessness and later provided \$100,000 in seed funding for Q-BLOK, now recognized as a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development best practice housing program. "I am a prime example of the impact that CCF has made in Milwaukee. The goal is to make sure other people feel empowered and have these opportunities that are not fully available everywhere."

Trenice Ferguson, Cream City Foundation board member



Trenice Ferguson says she is a prime example of the impact that the Cream City Foundation has had in the region. She received a foundation scholarship to pursue her master's in public service at Marquette University. She now serves on CCF's board.

The foundation also has fostered leadership within the LGBTQ+ community by awarding \$270,000 in scholarships – including a record-breaking \$50,000 in 2024.

"I am a prime example of the impact that CCF made in Milwaukee," said Trenice Ferguson. The \$2,500 scholarship she received in 2023 allowed her to continue pursuing her master's in public service at Marquette University at the time. She now serves as director of operations for the Community Development Alliance, a coalition advancing racial equity by ensuring quality, affordable housing for all Milwaukee residents.

"The goal is to make sure other people feel empowered and have these opportunities that are not fully available everywhere," said Ferguson, now a member of CCF's board who also serves on its scholarship committee.

CCF has weathered its share of difficulties over the years and has alternated between being volunteerdriven and having paid staff. Such expenditures have impacted its endowment.

"As a small organization, you can have turnover and feel very uncomfortable," Nash said.

Donor generosity and connections

The board felt a responsibility to safeguard CCF's legacy and in 2019 began conversations with the Foundation about becoming a supporting organization. CCF had created a designated fund at the Foundation in 2007 to support its grantmaking, and the two foundations had a number of donors in common, such as Ross Draegert and Robert Starshak.

The philanthropic couple has supported many LGBTQ+ community efforts, including LGBTQ+ acceptance, policy, and the LGBT milWALKee app, through the Birch Lodge Fund, a CCF fund they started in 1989. Draegert was one of CCF's early vice presidents. But they also started a Foundation fund within recent years because of its solid, longstanding history.



Charlie Nash, Cream City Foundation board chair

"The Foundation is known for being very reputable and solid," Starshak said. "If you put your money there, you knew it would be put to very responsible and impressive causes."

They view the new partnership between the two foundations as one that will provide greater long-term stability and sustainability for CCF.

Nash said what has led to CCF's longevity is its ability to meet the needs of the moment. With reduced operating expenses due to the Foundation's backoffice support, CCF can heighten its focus on donor engagement, convening and grantmaking.

"There is still an underrepresentation of philanthropy directed to the LGBTQ+ community versus needs we see," Nash said. "This relationship allows us to spend the time looking at the opportunities and organizations and talk to people doing that work."

"There is still an underrepresentation of philanthropy directed to the LGBTQ+ community versus needs we see. This relationship allows us to spend the time looking at the opportunities and organizations and talk to people doing that work."

Charlie Nash, Cream City Foundation board chair

Greater Cedarburg Foundation Preserving the past, powering the future



When the Greater Cedarburg Foundation began in 2000, its founders rallied behind the phrase "Cedarburg ... now and forever," words capturing the civic spirit the community has embodied ever since it was established in the 1840s.

GCF's founders wanted to preserve the community's rich heritage and historic identity while simultaneously contributing to its progress.

Twenty-five years later, the community foundation has not only done just that, but it has become the go-to place for local philanthropists interested in giving back to their community. GCF has grown to include \$8.5 million in assets and 16 affiliated funds, and it has awarded nearly \$1.9 million in grants.

"The generosity of GCF's donors helps keep Cedarburg an amazing place we can all be proud to be a part of," said Katie Pipkorn, GCF board president and a seventhgeneration Cedarburg resident.

Katie Pipkorn, Greater Cedarburg Foundation board president

The preservation of the city's unique charm and the creation of community foundations locally – in Oconomowoc and West Bend – were driving forces behind GCF's creation. The Greater Milwaukee Foundation issued a \$100,000 challenge grant to GCF organizers to help them build an initial endowment. A total of more than \$550,000 was raised within the first few years. GCF became a partner foundation in 2011, once its assets reached \$1 million.

Strong partnership equals strong community

Mal Hepburn, a longtime Cedarburg resident and civic leader, one of GCF's founding donors and its second board president, was an ardent supporter of having GCF affiliate with the Foundation. Leadership within the community and organizations change, he said, but the community foundation model was designed to forever support the goals of its donors.

"There is a permanence that comes with working with the Foundation that I find very appealing," said



The Greater Cedarburg Foundation has supported such area events as Summer Sounds, a popular summer concert series in Cedarburg.

Hepburn, who has three Foundation funds, including a supporting organization for his family.

GCF's core mission has been to support projects that maintain and enrich Cedarburg's cultural and historic heritage, programs that enhance its artistic and aesthetic experiences and organizations that provide educational, recreational and community service opportunities. Grants have helped create the Cedarburg History Museum and Cedarburg Art Museum in the downtown historic district as well as community gathering spots such as the library, playgrounds and the Cedar Creek Park bandshell, home to the popular 10-week Summer Sounds music series. GCF has also supported programs at area social service agencies.

"Their contributions have made a lasting impact on our community."

Sue Schrader, executive director of the Cedarburg Cultural Center

While its grants have ranged in size, the impact on organizations has been profound, grantees say.

"Their contributions have made a lasting impact on our community," said Sue Schrader, executive director of the Cedarburg Cultural Center, which was GCF's first grant recipient. Over the years, GCF has helped pay off the center's mortgage, install a new façade and signage and install lighting for its parking lot.

"They've kept Cedarburg's creative spirt alive and will for years to come," Schrader said.

Silver anniversary gives cause for applause

This September, GCF will host a free, communitywide celebration to mark its milestone anniversary. The event will include a parade, band performances, a kid zone and a nonprofit fair where organizations can showcase their missions.

"Our hope is to celebrate how far GCF has come over the last quarter century and to make sure the next generation is aware of both what we're doing and what resources are available to community," Pipkorn said.

Moving forward, Pipkorn said she hopes GCF can continue to amplify the impact of the community's many wonderful local organizations and continue to be a go-to partner for nonprofits.

"I want to have anyone feel in our area that they can come to us and see us as a partner," Pipkorn said.



The Cedarburg Art Museum is one of the Greater Cedarburg Foundation's many grantees over the years.

OAF has helped LifeStriders grow over the years to meet the needs of its clients. Its grants have helped the nonprofit build new stalls, make improvements to its outdoor viewing arena and purchase equipment for its occupational therapy clinic.



Oconomowoc Area Foundation

Oconomowoc Area Foundation Building a stronger Oconomowoc one grant at a time

If you have visited Oconomowoc in recent years and strolled along the boardwalk on Fowler Lake, visited Rockwell Park, caught a performance at the Oconomowoc Arts Center or saw a free outdoor movie downtown in the summer, you have the Oconomowoc Area Foundation to thank for a great experience.

Over the past 23 years, the community foundation has been investing in highly visible projects like these as well as programs that impact the Oconomowoc area deeply from behind the scenes.

Through its grantmaking, it has tackled food insecurity, addressed homelessness and provided support to individuals who don't have access to medical or dental care. In 2024 alone, OAF made a record \$308,000 in grants to 34 local nonprofits. "We are known for being there no matter what – providing resources and a way for people of all ages to give back to their community – whether time, talent or treasure," said Rebecca Seymour, OAF foundation coordinator, a donor and a former board member.

Its annual grantmaking supports programs for children and youth, older adults and people facing undue hardship. It also funds arts and culture and programs that preserve and protect the environment and wildlife.

The spark that started the OAF movement was the generosity of Hilbert Scherffius. In his will, the lifelong Oconomowoc resident and owner of Lorleberg's True Value Hardware created a fund "for the benefit of people and projects in the Oconomowoc area." An advisory committee of local leaders provided guidance on how to distribute the grants. Those leaders quickly discovered that the needs outpaced the funds available to meet them.

Solution forged through partnership

They approached the Greater Milwaukee Foundation about creating a partner foundation specifically for the Oconomowoc area. The Foundation offered a matching grant. Advisory board members then challenged other community leaders and philanthropists to contribute money toward an unrestricted endowment fund that could be used to support future community needs. More than 60 contributed \$10,000 each.

"The Foundation simplifies the complex better than just about any other organization I've ever worked with," said Craig Schiefelbein, who helped start OAF and whose family fund is now part of it. "I love being able to just focus on how I can make the world a better place."

OAF founders and donors say its affiliation with the Foundation as a supporting organization has been integral to the impact it has been able to have over the years. The Foundation provides critical back-office support, including investment management, nonprofit due diligence and grantmaking support, and tax paperwork.

"The partnership is invaluable," said Glenn Hanon, OAF board chair. "I cannot imagine trying to do this on your own."

"It is a local foundation that is answering the local needs, and that is so critical for people who have Oconomowoc as a special place in their heart."

Glenn Hanon, OAF board chair

Since its founding, OAF has awarded more than \$5 million to 130 area nonprofits. Organizations such as Blessings in a Backpack and LifeStriders say OAF has been a critical part of helping them carry out their missions.

"People really know us as on the ground, walking alongside nonprofits," Seymour said. "Our purpose is to be always listening and learning to know what the changing needs are."



Glenn Hanon, OAF chairman; Megan Welsh, Lake Area Free Clinic marketing & development director; Audra O'Connell, Lake Area Free Clinic executive director; Paula Jacobs, OAF vice chair; Amy Kavelaris, OAF board member and Rebecca Seymour, OAF foundation coordinator.

Tangible impact over time

Blessings in a Backpack has received grant support from OAF and its donors since 2016. It serves 3,400 students across seven school districts, providing bags of ready-to-eat food on Fridays so they have enough to eat over the weekends.

"They have been instrumental in helping with outreach in the Oconomowoc community extending beyond to more rural areas in Waukesha County that experience food insecurity," said Susan Reed, managing director of Blessings in a Backpack Waukesha County. "The OAF is a strong partner that believes in giving back to the community."

OAF has helped LifeStriders grow over the years to meet the needs of its clients. The nonprofit provides therapeutic horseback riding to people with physical, emotional and cognitive special needs, serving about 250 clients a week. OAF grants helped it build new stalls, make improvements to its outdoor viewing arena and purchase equipment for its occupational therapy clinic.

OAF hopes to continue to raise awareness among area individuals and families so it can grow its endowment and make gifts with even larger impact, Hanon said.

"It is a local foundation that is answering the local needs, and that is so critical for people who have Oconomowoc as a special place in their heart," said Hanon.

WEST BEND COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Championing child care and community change

Rob Johnson, executive director of the Kettle Moraine YMCA and a West Bend Community Foundation board member.



In West Bend, when the community sees a need, they are quick to respond and determine the best organization to tackle that issue.

For more than a quarter century, that organization has been the West Bend Community Foundation.

The community foundation has helped the greater West Bend area in various ways over the years – namely by building up the community while also supporting those in need. Through the generosity of its donors, it has invested millions in arts and culture, education, environment, health and human services and capital projects such as renovating Old Settlers Park, a popular gathering spot downtown.

Now WBCF, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's oldest and largest partner foundation, is taking on a more significant role by tackling one of the region's most entrenched issues – access to early childhood education. WBCF has allocated \$150,000 over the next three years to expand workforce options, advocate for increased access, invest in facilities and support agencies that address the development of children from birth to age 8. The Greater Milwaukee Foundation, which has had early childhood education as a top priority for many years, matched the investment with a \$150,000 grant, and Washington County has invested \$100,000 through American Rescue Plan Act funds.

"There is a tremendous amount of power when foundations work together, donors work together and community organizations all work together," said Rob Johnson, a WBCF board member and executive director of the Kettle Moraine YMCA, the largest child care provider in the county.



This deeper focus marks an evolution at WBCF, from strictly grantmaking to more of a community leadership role. The organization started in 1999 thanks to West Bend civic leaders Cliff Nelson and Doug Ziegler, who believed that people ought to give back to the community in which they live. They put their words into action by pooling together \$2 million in unrestricted funds to launch WBCF as a supporting organization at the Foundation. It now has 60 charitable funds and \$83.6 million in assets.

"There is a tremendous amount of power when foundations work together, donors work together and community organizations all work together."

Rob Johnson, WBCF board member and executive director of the Kettle Moraine YMCA

Public-private collaboration

The seeds for this new initiative were planted several years ago. In 2020, WBCF added a nonprofit representative to its board to help strengthen its relationship with the nonprofit community. In 2023, it created a committee focused on identifying community needs that had not been met and figuring out how to address them through grants and other resources. Through a series of community conversations that year, modeled off the Foundation's successful On the Table MKE initiative, WBCF identified early childhood care and education as a top priority.

High-quality educational programs have multiple benefits for the community. They set children up for academic, social and developmental success. When parents have access to affordable care, they're able to take on jobs outside the home, thereby strengthening the workforce.

Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann has wanted to address that quality-of-life issue for the past five years, but said he had a hard time



Betty Nelson and her husband, Cliff, co-founder of the West Bend Community Foundation.

convincing the county board to make it a strategic priority. WBCF's role as a convener and its proposed solutions for addressing the issue helped convince the county board to invest.

"I am really excited that WBCF has taken a lead, and we can play a supporting role," he said. "This forges a relationship that could have a sustainable path forward to create more child care workers."

In 2024, WBCF granted money to 4C for Children, Moraine Park Technical College and Forward Careers to bolster the early childhood education workforce. A \$20,000 grant allows Moraine Park to offer scholarships to students interested in pursuing a degree in early childhood education. 4C for Children received \$10,000 to provide training and certification for individuals interested in an early childhood education career or becoming a child care provider. Through its workbased learning program, funded by a \$81,000 grant, Forward Careers connects interested applicants to area employers, covers the costs for training and certification, pays for an individual's first 350 hours of work and provides coaching.

"At a time when child care costs often outpace rent, tuition, or even the net benefit of full-time work, we recognize the urgency of investing in this critical sector," said Cindy Simons, president and CEO of Forward Careers. "Our goal is to not only raise wages but also to elevate the profession – supporting individuals as they earn industry-recognized credentials, gain hands-on experience, and pursue long-term, sustainable careers in early childhood education."

Modeling innovative solutions

Johnson and Schoemann see the potential for the new program to serve as a model for other communities.

"The close working relationship between the county and the community foundation has really strengthened Washington County and West Bend in particular," Schoemann said. "At the end of the day, partnerships are the things that have the biggest bang for buck and are most effective in the long run."

Though this is a newer focus for WBCF, board president Claire Rolfs said the foundation will continue to give as it has in the past, a mixture of annual operating grants and special project support.

"We're not walking away from the smaller grants, but we've grown enough that we can sustain both," Rolfs said. "As a community foundation, our role is to take care of the community as best we can."

"At a time when child care costs often outpace rent, tuition, or even the net benefit of full-time work, we recognize the urgency of investing in this critical sector."

Cindy Simons, president and CEO of Forward Careers



Doug Ziegler, co-founder of the West Bend Community Foundation, and his wife, Sharon.

INVESTING INPOSSIBILITY

The people and projects shaping an economically stronger Milwaukee

When an entrepreneur has a vision that could transform their community, access to capital can be the catalyst that turns a good idea into real impact. In southeastern Wisconsin, a growing group of changemakers is proving what's possible when the right resources meet the right people at the right time.

Through a model known as impact investing, local businesses and organizations are securing the capital they need to grow, thanks to the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. The Foundation has been using this method since 2017, helping to fuel opportunity, ownership and resilience in communities that have long been denied equitable access to capital. This is how the Foundation advances its vision of a Milwaukee for all: by investing in people and projects that create lasting, community-centered change.

Structured as loans, equity investments or guarantees, impact investments provide timely support while ultimately delivering a financial return so funds can be reinvested in new projects. This creates a cycle of sustainability.

"The beauty of impact investing is that the money keeps recycling in communities where private and public funding have been inadequate," said Kermiath McClendon, the Foundation's impact investing manager. "It's uplifting



The Sherman Phoenix is a small business incubator located within Milwaukee's Sherman Park neighborhood. It was one of the Foundation's original impact investing clients.

how this project can impact not just the business owners themselves but our overall economic vitality."

Since 2017, the Foundation and its donors have committed more than \$22 million through its impact investing program, \$4 million of which has come from donor contributions. It has invested in 19 ZIP codes in southeastern Wisconsin and helped create or retain 852 full- and part-time jobs and counting. Ninety-nine percent of loans are in good standing.

Some of the Foundation's clients reflect on how far they've come and where they are going.

Sherman Phoenix Foundation

The Sherman Phoenix Foundation was part of the Foundation's original impact investing pilot program in 2017. A \$300,000 Foundation loan provided first mortgage financing for the rehabilitation and renovation of a former BMO Harris Bank that was damaged during the civil unrest in Sherman Park in 2016. The building reopened in 2018 as an entrepreneurial hub.

"Sherman Phoenix was developed as a retail location to allow Black small business owners to grow their businesses and generate jobs," said Stacia Thompson, president and CEO of the Sherman Phoenix Foundation. "It quickly became the heartbeat of the community."

The 27 vendors in the marketplace there range from food and drink purveyors to clothing and art retailers. Regular community events include a community business academy, line dance classes and an annual community baby shower.

Since 2018, Sherman Phoenix has been home to 61 Blackowned businesses; of the original 27, 86 percent are still operating. Its "grow and go" model supports them as they incubate and then move to stand-alone spaces, such as Funky Fresh Spring Rolls and Lush Popcorn have done.

"We hate to see them leave, love to see them go," Thompson said.



Colorful Connections

Colorful Connections, a diversity and equity recruiting and retention firm, works with two types of clients: professionals from historically marginalized communities who are navigating the next move on their professional journey and business leaders seeking to create inclusive workplace cultures to improve talent retention and maximize performance.

Colorful Connections received a \$50,000 small business loan from the Foundation in 2020.

"The loan was critical to us," said Morgan Phelps, founder and CEO. "Work was picking up, but as an early-stage company, we didn't qualify for a bank line of credit or a loan."

She said the loan helped the firm stabilize and bring on additional contractors as business grew.

The firm has nearly 4,500 candidates in its database. Of candidates they have placed, 73 percent are people of color and 66 percent identify as Black. On the consulting side, Colorful Connections provides, on average, 24 consultations a month to businesses and nonprofits in fields as diverse as media, neighborhood building and marketing.

Kermiath McClendon found his job with the Foundation through Colorful Connections.

"Many career placement firms treat you like a box to check off their list," he said. "Colorful Connections genuinely cares about your career aspirations and matching them with empowering opportunities."

Business leaders who have used Colorful Connections' consulting services praise it as well.

"Their biggest impact has been on building trust and empathy across our organization," said Devin Martin, talent acquisition director for Bader Rutter, a marketing agency.

Midpoint Ventures



Midpoint Ventures is an artificial intelligence consulting firm that provides education and training to businesses that use generative AI.

"Where businesses are having trouble is that they might have five to 10 pilot users who use the Al tools effectively, but they don't know how to train everybody else,"

said Israel Squires, CEO and co-founder. Midpoint's client-customized software addresses that issue.

Midpoint received a \$300,000 loan from the Foundation in fall 2023. Squires said the capital infusion came at the right time for the company to become established as a consulting firm.

"Seed funding through the Foundation is going to have a generational impact on workers in southeastern Wisconsin," he said.

The firm plans to make at least seven new hires, onboard 50,000 workers through its ElevateU platform and expand beyond Wisconsin. Since getting its impact investment, the firm has trained over 4,000 workers, primarily in manufacturing companies.

"We're putting people in a position to get jobs they never thought they could get," Squires said. "That will make a big impact on the racial wealth gap."

From rebuilding a neighborhood hub in Sherman Park to building a more inclusive workforce and pioneering AI education, these ventures show how targeted investments can ripple far beyond the bottom line.

State-funded matching grant program helps Foundation expand

IMPACT INVESTING

Small business growth helps elevate communities and keep them thriving. Thanks to a recent investment that the Greater Milwaukee Foundation attracted from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and gifts from Foundation donors, 16 small businesses in metro Milwaukee are receiving critical funding to help build their capacity and strengthen their future.

The Foundation received a \$300,000 matching grant from WEDC's Capital Catalyst Program last fall to focus on emerging growth businesses through its ThriveOn Small Business Loan Program. Foundation donors provided generous matching funds, and additional assets were allocated by the Foundation's Board to amplify the impact. A total of \$800,000 was disbursed to businesses ranging from an asphalt contractor to an herbal apothecary. Each business received a \$50,000 loan.

"When we invest together in our region's small business sector, we create opportunities for economic mobility," said Greg Wesley, Foundation president and CEO. "As local businesses thrive, so do we all." Margaret Henningsen was among the Foundation donors who contributed to the program, viewing its mission as in sync with that of her donor advised fund, the Legacy Foundation. The fund was created when Legacy Bank, which she helped create with two other Black women, closed in 2011. Like the bank, the Legacy Foundation fund has focused primarily on supporting economic development.

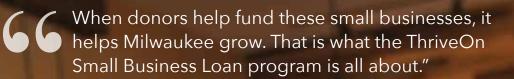
"Being able to contribute to a large collective pool of funds leads to greater impact at the end of day," Henningsen said. "When donors help fund these small businesses, it helps Milwaukee grow. That is what the ThriveOn Small Business Loan program is all about."

In addition to featuring a below-market 2 percent interest rate, the ThriveOn Small Business Loans Program provides recipients with access to technical support to improve business operations in areas such as accounting and technology. With its investments, the Foundation also helps open the door for these businesses to access other traditional capital sources.

EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IN GREATER MILWAUKEE

Last year, donors contributed \$485,000 in gifts to the Foundation's impact investing program. If you are interested in helping the Foundation grow its capacity to help local businesses and projects, consider a gift to the Impact Investing Fund.

Donor Margaret Henningsen and Angela Mallett, owner of HoneyBee Sage Wellness & Apothecary, a ThriveOn Small Business Loan recipient.



Margaret Henningsen, Foundation donor



A strong arts sector is crucial for a vibrant metro Milwaukee. In 2024, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and its donors invested more than \$9.5 million in the arts — from local museums and dance companies to theater and public art projects — to add to the region's vitality. Here are three recent examples:

Public art honors visionary developer of Milwaukee's Halyard Park neighborhood

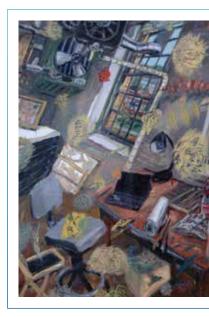
Milwaukee realtor and developer Beechie Brooks encountered his fair share of doubters when he sought to create a suburban-style subdivision for the Black middle class in Milwaukee. But his persistence paid off, and the naysayers were silenced when Halyard Park, an area spanning four city blocks and encompassing 44 homes, came to fruition. It changed the character of a neighborhood on the decline and set the standard for central city residential redevelopment.



His daughter and Foundation donor, Cassandra Brooks, and the Halyard Park Neighborhood Association Foundation are spearheading an effort to make sure his vision and the neighborhood's history will forever be preserved. They are raising \$125,000 to install a life-size bronze statue of Brooks at North Sixth and West Lloyd streets. It will face south toward the first house that he helped build. The Foundation was one of the project's early supporters with a \$50,000 grant, which the association has leveraged to encourage other contributions.



Beechie and Cassandra Brooks





New 'Wisconsin Wonder' taking shape on Sixth Street

The largest cultural project in state history ranked among the top 10 funded projects by Foundation donors in 2024. Donors provided more than \$716,000 in grants to the Milwaukee Public Museum's "Wisconsin Wonders" campaign, which seeks to raise \$250 million for a new, five-story, 200,000-square-foot building on Sixth Street and McKinley Avenue. Named the Nature & Culture Museum of Wisconsin, the building will replace the nonprofit's current location, which was constructed in the early 1960s and has \$100 million in deferred maintenance. It is set to open in 2027.

Foundation donors have given more than \$4.5 million to the capital campaign since 2021.

Artist rendering of the new Nature & Culture Museum of Wisconsin

Fellowship invests in local talent, elevates Milwaukee art scene on national stage

In the early 2000s, Milwaukee was hemorrhaging artistic talent. Support for artists, through the National Endowment for the Arts and other entities, had ceased. Many artists couldn't sustain their work and were leaving town.

At the same time, one of Milwaukee's well-known artists, Mary Nohl, died, leaving a \$9.6 million bequest to the Foundation. Her creative spirit and the community's need led the Foundation to use a portion of her gift to create the Mary L. Nohl Fund Fellowships for Individual Artists, which provide unrestricted support to emerging and established visual artists.

Mary Nohl

Since 2003, 126 fellowships have been awarded to creatives ranging from painters to filmmakers, from recent college graduates to septuagenarians. The program also has provided 414 artists and 26 artist collectives with funds to exhibit their work on the national and international stage.



Michael Newhall, 2025 Mary Nohl Fellow: Established Artist, "Foot Before and Foot Behind: Double Self-Portrait with Studio Attendants," 2023-2024 Sarah Ballard, 2025 Mary Nohl Fellow: Emerging Artists," Full Out," 2025

A leader of leaders

Jeanette Mitchell, known by many as "Dr. J," saw the possibility in others that they might not have seen in themselves.

That also went for Milwaukee, the city in which she lived, worked and raised her three daughters.

Described by friends, family and colleagues as a trailblazer in Milwaukee's leadership landscape and a leader of leaders, Mitchell built a career and reputation from creating leaders, fostering connections and bringing about change in the region.

The Dr. Jeanette Mitchell Legacy Fund, a donor advised fund her daughters created at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation after her death in August 2024, is a way to continue Mitchell's work in Milwaukee.

Jeanette Mitchell was well known in Milwaukee for her work in leadership development. "Our mother was all about making change – real change – and channeling energy and resources into making an impact," said daughter Pamela Mitchell. "The fund is the vehicle through which we will continue to maintain and grow her legacy."

To celebrate her memory, Mitchell's family has encouraged family and friends to help build the fund.

"It really is the mechanism that allows her vision for what is possible and her values to continue to live in perpetuity," said daughter Yvette Murrell.

All corners of community

Mitchell was a leader throughout her long career, which spanned the corporate, philanthropic, education and nonprofit sectors. She spent 30 years with Ameritech, directing teams ranging from five to 500, both statewide and regionally. She also was the first Black woman at the company to become a district manager. During that time, she also served her community as an elected representative to the Milwaukee Public Schools board. She spent three terms as board president, under three different superintendents. Mitchell later moved on to the world of philanthropy, where she became the first education program officer at Bader Philanthropies.

But it was her work over the past two decades around leadership development that perhaps has had the strongest ripple effect locally.

"She had a lot of love to give," Murrell said. "Once she was done growing us, she needed more people to grow. That was part of her gift. She needed to continue to give it."

Mitchell received her doctorate in leadership from Cardinal Stritch University, and soon afterward, she established the university's Leadership Center in 2001. While there, she helped design and manage several leadership development programs. The Latino Nonprofit Leadership Program, created in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Roberto Hernandez Center, worked with individuals in nonprofits who served the Latino community. The Neighborhood Leadership Institute, created in partnership with the Foundation and several other local funders, focused on building the capacity of community and nonprofit leaders to influence and strengthen Milwaukee neighborhoods.

"Boots-on-the-ground leaders is what she was really committed to growing," said daughter Yvonne Mitchell. "That is the most sustainable way to bring about change."

Growing the next generation

She is most known and celebrated, however, for creating the African American Leadership Program, a nine-month program in which more than 250 Milwaukee-area African American professionals, from an array of businesses, professions and organizations, have participated since 2008.



Jeanette Mitchell and her three daughters, Yvonne Mitchell, Pamela Mitchell and Yvette Murrell. Photo by Ramsey Braden, Mitchell's grandson.

It grew out of her deep love for Milwaukee and her concern that many Black professionals felt that they needed to leave the city to grow and lead. Mitchell believed that by building leaders and fostering connections between those individuals, a whole new generation of leaders are developed who can work together to begin to tackle the region's toughest, most persistent issues and change the narrative.

"A lot of leaders that came through that program you now see out here pushing for change in Milwaukee," said Margaret Henningsen, who, along with Mitchell, has been an adviser to the Legacy Foundation Fund, a Foundation donor advised fund, since 2011.

Darlene Russell, the Foundation's director of community engagement, worked with Mitchell to create the Neighborhood Leadership Institute in 2013 and participated in AALP in 2016. She said the lessons she learned and conversations she had with Mitchell still reverberate and contribute to her work in community.

"I didn't always get it in the moment, but the seeds were planted, and I could reach back on those conversations and really grow," Russell said.

In addition to supporting AALP, Mitchell's daughters plan to use the fund to advance other areas of passion, such as education.

"The fund serves as a vehicle to ensure that her impact, legacy and influence endure for generations to come," Pamela said.

To make a gift to the Dr. Jeanette Mitchell Legacy Fund, visit greatermilwaukeefoundation.org/partners/donate.

In Their Own Words: Literacy Services of Wisconsin

Literacy Services of Wisconsin, the only comprehensive adult education provider in the state, recently entered a philanthropic partnership with the Greater Milwaukee Foundation that will help secure its future and advance its mission in community.

The 60-year-old nonprofit offers free adult education programs in reading, writing and math; English language learning; and high school equivalency. The organization operates with a staff of 28 and 270 volunteer tutors at five locations, four in Milwaukee and one in Waukesha.

LSW offers a variety of learning methods to meet each student's unique educational goals. These include one-onone tutoring, small group or classroom format with a tutor and/or instructor, and classes by Milwaukee Area Technical College instructors at two LSW locations.

LSW approached the Foundation about establishing an agency endowment fund, an instrument that provides regular distributions to the organization. The Foundation manages more than 150 such endowment funds, which are meant to provide support for long-term organizational sustainability and growth.



For 60 years, Literacy Services has offered free adult education programs in reading, writing and math; English language learning; and high school equivalency.

The principal provided by the nonprofit to create the fund is invested, and revenue is generated from the investment earnings. This allows the funds to grow in perpetuity for the organization. The dollars can be used for operating support, grant services, programmatic support and more. Some agencies fondly call it "our little nest egg."

Below is a conversation with Holly McCoy, the nonprofit's executive director, about why LSW chose to work with the Foundation.

LSW's endowment with the Foundation is relatively new, slightly over a year old. Why did your agency decide to create an endowment here?

Our endowment is small, currently around \$100,000. At first, we thought that it might be too small for the Foundation. But the Development and Philanthropic Services staff assured us that we would receive the same thoughtful advice and support as agencies with much larger endowments. One of the many benefits of the Foundation is that it's local; we know the folks who work there, and they are very knowledgeable. Plus, the way the Foundation reinvests its dollars in our community is ethical and community-driven. This appeals to us. We haven't taken a disbursement yet but will soon, after doing a review of our portfolio. It's likely we will use the disbursement to reinvest in our operations.

What will the endowment allow LSW to do?

None of us wants to talk about the dark days of COVID-19, but the pandemic actually provided an opportunity for us to see the things we couldn't plan for. The Foundation is helping us keep in front of mind the unexpected things, the unknowns, and do our best to be prepared for them. Hopefully, some of these unknowns will never happen, but the goal is to be ready.

What advice to you have for other nonprofits thinking about setting up an endowment?

As a nonprofit, we are mission-driven but are also a business. Our aim is to make sure we're being as thoughtful with our dollars as anyone else. So if you can do it, think about creating an endowment. It will help you be better positioned for the future and for the unexpected. "Non-readers can come to us and leave with the ability to read, with a high school diploma, and a direct connection to workforce development and training opportunities." – Holly McCoy, executive director



Literacy Services provides one-on-one tutoring in addition to small group or classroom format with a tutor and classes by Milwaukee Area Technical College instructors.





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