

communityaction

Fall 2023



An affiliate of
Fremont Area Community Foundation

Finding your true north

Larry Treece



Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Larry Treece observed what many others in the area did as the weather got warm: “In the summers, people migrated north,” he said. For Larry’s father, Baldwin was the perfect spot for hunting and enjoying nature. A love for Lake County has now been shared with subsequent generations of the Treece family. In the early 1980s, Larry and his late wife Arlene bought property on Government Lake and then Big Star Lake. Today, Larry, his children, and grandchildren all love spending time at the lake cottage.

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"Lake County is beautiful, and the people here are great," said Larry. "We have had up to 19 of us at the cottage, with kids and grandkids. "We've done every holiday here. There is so much tradition that the kids and grandkids love."

Larry—a military veteran and president and CEO of a home healthcare company—is not just a vacationer in Lake County. He's a local volunteer, active in the Big Star Lake Association, serves on the fire rescue team, and even transferred his Rotary membership here. In fact, it was through Rotary that he first got to know the Community Foundation.

"My Rotary family introduced me," he said. "I didn't know much about it before that. I learned that the Community Foundation offered different levels of giving. It gave me a gateway."

Larry and Arlene began thinking about ways they could get involved and permanently support Lake County. They ultimately created a donor advised fund at the Community Foundation. Larry has been proud to use the fund to support the local marine patrol in particular. It has helped fund equipment upgrades and training.

"You can see the results," Larry said. "I'm seeing what it does in our community and the appreciation for it."

Along with a genuine love for Lake County, Larry's commitment to giving and service has been inspired by the examples of others. "You meet all these people who are doing things in their communities," he said. "I've learned about foundations, Rotary, and other ways to give from them. There are so many people I've met who are great examples of giving."



His first examples were his parents. As part of their faith, stewardship and service were shared as important values. "My parents were factory and domestic workers," said Larry. "They didn't always have much money, but they gave their time. You don't always need money to give."

"My parents gave me the compass," Larry continued. "And then, when you're older, you decide what your true north is. Part of my true north is Baldwin."

Meeting community needs

The River Community Center provides personal care items and a gathering space

Just outside of Baldwin, on M37, sits The River Community Center. The 12,000 square foot building was purchased in 2019 by Lake Fellowship Ministries, and anyone who has visited will tell you what they are doing inside is nothing short of a miracle. "The community had no gathering space," said Rev. Bruce Whitney. "We knew local kids needed a space, but when we opened up the building, it was a mess."

The group took a run-down commercial building and converted it into a place where the community can enjoy amenities that they may not otherwise have access to. The center now has a community space, meeting spaces, an activity center, and can host gatherings for seniors, children, and families.

Last year, The River received a grant from the Community Foundation to create a personal care center in the building. Thanks to the grant and the efforts of several hardworking volunteers, they were able to convert an old loading

station into a pantry where patrons can receive clothing and personal care items for free. It was designed to look more like a local shop than a pantry. "It's bright and well organized. When you walk in you feel warm and welcome," says Diane Smolinski, director of the pantries. "I don't ever want anyone to feel shame when they walk in."

Lake Fellowship Ministries is made up of area pastors who connect across denominations to better serve the community they love. The group is passionate about serving, and no one better exemplifies this than The River's executive director Rev. Debbie Alley. Debbie has led the charge on renovating the space, including raising \$40,000 over the last year to pay for the building. Her role as executive director, the equivalent of a full-time position, is completely volunteer based. "It really is all about heart and passion when you do this ministry," said Debbie. "That's what you'll see when you walk into the building."

Rev. Debbie Alley



Moving our work forward

Action planning update

Over the last 18 months, the Community Foundation has developed an updated action plan to guide its work moving forward. The process has included extensive research, conversations, and community feedback.

"This work is important to give us direction and purpose," said Maria E. Gonzalez, senior director. "We want donors to be able to understand how their money will be used, and we want grantees to know what our priorities will be."

The action plan began with Fremont Area Community Foundation's strategic planning process. Fremont Area Community Foundation serves Newaygo County and hosts three affiliate foundations, including our own and the community foundations in Mecosta and Osceola counties. All four foundations were actively involved in the development of Fremont Area Community Foundation's four primary goals: optimize operational enhancements, promote the common good, expand philanthropy, and strengthen capacity for people and communities.

While we have adopted these goals as an overall guide for our own work, each community foundation in our

four-county region has also developed an action plan specific to the needs, resources, and character of their own county.

"While some of our efforts happen across the region, some are very specific to the particular county," said Maria. "There are specific things we are engaging in for each area."

In Lake County, increased emphasis will be placed on opportunities to engage with local groups and explore ways we can better work with and help them. Taking a more proactive approach to projects and partnerships is a focus as well. Staff and trustees plan to spend more time visiting nonprofit partners to see programs at work and make greater connections.

Along with a focus on increased engagement and other action steps, the new plan is intended to grow along with the Community Foundation.

"The new strategic action plan is an important guide for our work but is also a flexible document that can change and be updated as community needs change and shift," she continued. "We are excited about having a plan that can be implemented and allow us to move forward in a strategic manner."



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Trustee spotlight

Seth Wenger

Seth Wenger grew up in Baldwin and has spent nearly 50 years working or living in Lake County. "Lake County offers both a great community and natural resources," said Seth. "What we lack in traditional amenities and industry, we make up for with beautiful lakes, rivers, trails, and individuals."

From his parents and grandparents, Seth learned the importance of giving and getting involved. "Witnessing them giving their time and resources to the community established an expectation of community involvement early in life," he said. "It's a requirement for anyone that wants a better life for their children."

As he grew up and became active in his community—with Rotary, Troutarama, Pathfinder Library, and other causes—Seth discovered what felt like a natural connection with the Community Foundation.

"It seemed natural to work with a community foundation that touches so many common efforts," said Seth. "People often

wear many hats in a small community. Events and causes often overlap with shared interests and volunteers. It's nearly impossible to be involved in Lake County and not be impacted positively by the Community Foundation."

Today, Seth is the third-generation owner of Wenger Insurance. Since 2018, he has also served as a Community Foundation trustee, learning about what he calls the "exponential force of collective impact." He has enjoyed working with the diverse, positive community members who guide the organization. He believes it is the cooperative efforts of neighbors and communities that can truly make a difference.

"I wish people knew how easy it is to make an impact in your community," said Seth. "Small donations of time or resources by many over time has led to a robust community resource in the Community Foundation."

Supporting Lake County

Giving through your estate plan

The Community Foundation offers a variety of ways to connect local needs with individuals who want to provide and serve. Over our 30-year history as a community foundation, we have had countless donors provide generous opportunities in our area.

One of the most significant gifts to the Community Foundation was through a charitable bequest. In 2003, Rick Simonson continued a legacy that had been started many years before. Rick was given the opportunity to serve as a page in the Michigan House of Representative. Through this opportunity, he started his career path of service to the State of Michigan. Rick served in many areas, including education and government, but never forgot his small town roots in Baldwin.

Rick wanted to make sure kids in Lake County had the opportunity to have experiences like he did. His charitable bequest helped provide one of the most significant scholarship opportunities for Baldwin Community Schools students. Prior to Rick's passing, he was also influential in starting other educational fund opportunities for Lake County students.

Sometimes a charitable bequest is a great way for a donor to give, even if giving today is not a possibility. Including the Community Foundation in your charitable bequest allows you to support the community in a variety of ways. You can dedicate your gift to your favorite cause or local nonprofit or help the Community Foundation assist with general community needs as they arise.

If you are interested in talking about how to give to the Community Foundation, we would be happy to assist you. Contact Katie Boven at kboven@facommunityfoundation.org to discuss how to include us in your estate or make a gift today to benefit Lake County.





2023 financials

Impact by the numbers

TOTAL GIFTS	\$17,101
TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS	\$17,600
TOTAL GRANTS	\$13,317
Community grants	\$6,117
Donor advised/agency endowment/designated grants	\$7,200

All data as of May 31, 2023



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The newsletter of Lake County Community Foundation

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Chair's note



As always, summer has not disappointed in Lake County. It has been great to go out and see everyone enjoy the season. Whether it was fishing or boating on a nearby lake, finding time to go hiking or camping, or even just walking downtown Baldwin and checking out the shops, people were definitely enjoying everything the area has to offer.

At the Community Foundation, we have also taken advantage of many opportunities to get out this summer and visit with grantees, such as The River Community Center and Shrine of the Pines. Through our visits, we learned more about how our community partners are using their grant funding to impact the county.

Speaking of grants, this year we have been able to award \$100,000 in grants to Lake County nonprofits so far. Organizations were awarded in June and we look forward to seeing these programs in action.

We also have a lot to look forward to in the upcoming fall season. This year, we added a second grant round to better serve our partners. Grant applications were due on September 15 and we also increased our grant funding limit from \$5,000 to \$10,000. We hope this will better serve local nonprofits as costs continue to rise.

Thank you all for your continued support. With your help, we have been able to accomplish some big things this year, and we can't wait to see what the rest of 2023 has to offer!

Respectfully,

Herb Early
Board Chair