

# communityaction

Fall 2023



## Honing a skill

*Earful of Fiddle provides immersive camp experience*



If you're an aspiring dancer or folk musician living in central Michigan, you don't have to go far to find a place where you can connect and learn with people who share your interests. Each summer, Camp Brethren Heights in Rodney is transformed into Earful of Fiddle, a five-day immersive fiddle and dance camp. For 15 years, the camp has been running under the passion and guidance of Kris and Bruce Stableford and Nic Gareiss.



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In addition to learning about fiddle music and dance, Earful of Fiddle offers campers the opportunity to explore the banjo, ukulele, mandolin, and even square dance calling. And because it is not exclusively a youth camp, participants have the chance to connect across generations. In many cases, adults and children are in the same classes learning together.

The camp also attracts artists of all levels of experience. “I remember getting ready to teach an advanced dancing class and giving my students an exercise that would normally take 10 minutes for a good dancer to grasp, and they all were doing it perfectly immediately,” says Nic. “I felt so privileged to be with that caliber of students who were so passionate and eager to grow.”

While this unique experience draws participants from all over the country—and even some from as far as Halifax, Nova Scotia—Kris and Nic, who are both from the area, are also excited to make sure local people have the opportunities they wished they had growing up.

“Growing up in mid-Michigan, there were no places for an aspiring dancer to go,” said Nic. “If you wanted to go to something like our camp, you would need to travel to the East or West Coast or even overseas.”

Earful of Fiddle puts great thought and care into making their camp as accessible as possible for all participants. More than a quarter of campers receive scholarships to attend, including scholarships specifically for Black, Indigenous, and people of color as well as LGBTQ+ participants. They are also thoughtful about making their setting more accessible for people with disabilities or mobility issues.

“Camp Brethren Heights is a stunning location for hosting a camp. It offers beautiful hills and amazing views of the



lake,” said Kris. “However, with that landscape also comes the difficulty of our differently-abled individuals navigating around the camp.”

This year, thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation, the camp was able to rent two golf carts that were used to transport campers, volunteers, and instructors who needed assistance getting across the camp. “A large portion of the camp is on a hill, so having the carts to transport individuals was a huge blessing,” said Nic. The carts served as another tool to support Earful of Fiddle’s goal to continue growing and increasing their ability to be as accessible and inclusive as possible.



# An evening out

*Community Foundation hosts Gather and Grow event*

A small gathering of community members and friends of the Community Foundation came together on August 21 at the Winery @ Young Farms in Mecosta. At the evening event, guests were treated to dinner from Phat Matt's Food Truck and drinks from the Winery @ Young Farms and had plenty of time to mingle and make new friends. The evening also featured live music by Mir and the Man.

"This event was a wonderful way to bring our friends together from across our communities," said Board Chair Tom Tacia. "We want to raise awareness not only for the Community Foundation, but for the dedicated nonprofits it supports."

Guests were introduced to trustees and staff, and Tom thanked Mark Young, who also serves as a Community Foundation trustee, and Abby Young for hosting the event. The event highlighted some of the Community Foundation's recent work and ways to get involved, including the Cornerstone Legacy Society and giving to the Community Needs Fund.

"One of the ways we recognize individuals who have given an estate gift is through the Cornerstone Legacy Society," explained Tom. "The society was named in honor of the group of individuals who helped us start the Community Needs Fund during our cornerstone campaign 30 years ago. The Community Needs Fund is an unrestricted fund. The fund provides the Community Foundation the most flexibility to serve the needs of the community. By supporting this fund, you are directly supporting those who need help by supporting organizations who can give it."

The event also touched on an important part of the Community Foundation's mission: creating positive change in Mecosta County. "Tonight was a way for people to get to know us in a more informal environment," said Tom. "We look forward to continuing to build new relationships all around Mecosta County."





# 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 Lake 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."

For Mecosta County Community Foundation, the Gather and Grow event at the Winery @ Young Farms in August was one step in the overall goal to expand philanthropy. The event for new friends and emeritus trustees provided an avenue for fun, conversation, and an increased awareness of the work of the Community Foundation. People could learn more about our organization's efforts and how they can get involved, all while enjoying a nice evening out.

"Events, newsletters, and more storytelling are all ways we can raise awareness of the Community Foundation, expand our reach, and introduce more people to philanthropy," said Maria.

"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."





## Our board

Tom Tacia, Chair

Emily Fransted

Matt Currie, Vice Chair

Melissa Janowicz

Dr. Ralph Crew, Second Vice Chair

Nick Scheible

Kim von Kronenberger, Past President

Deb Stauffer

Josh Eling

Mark Young



## Trustee spotlight

*Kim von Kronenberger*

Originally from Greenville, Community Foundation trustee Kim von Kronenberger was familiar with the Mecosta County area even before settling here. After living out of state for a time, Kim returned to Michigan and has since made this community home.

"I always wanted to get back to Michigan," he said. "I fell in love with this area, with the lakes and the community. The people here are friendly, they have a lot of heart, and they're very giving. They care for one another."

Today, Kim is regional president for State Savings Bank and leads the bank's Big Rapids office. His extensive community banking experience is not only the foundation of his career but also his inspiration for giving and service.

"In community banking, it is always encouraged to be a part of the community and to give back locally," said Kim. "I've been fortunate to work for smaller banks that were very

much a part of the community. That's what inspired my own approach to giving."

Kim first got to know the Community Foundation through his involvement with the annual Shamrock Invitational Golf Outing and the endowment fund they created. He later joined the board and, this December, will complete his second term. He is also a past board president.

While the number of scholarships and grants awarded each year are a testament to the Community Foundation's impact, Kim said, the true scope is seen "in the perpetual nature of the organization. It's going to be here long after we're gone. There will still be grants and scholarships being awarded. There is going to be a legacy that continues."



# Supporting Mecosta County

## *Giving through your estate plan*

One of the unique ways the Community Foundation can serve you is through our capacity to help you meet your philanthropic goals. We do this by connecting people's abilities to local needs. Our community has been generous in helping us give back to those in need.

An estate gift is one of the most impactful ways you can give back to your community. Many of our donors get to know us through current giving opportunities. Through this relationship, we are able to demonstrate how we meet the needs of the community and support local organizations. It allows us to get to know our donors' interests and how they want to make a local impact. These gifts can lead to an opportunity to add the Community Foundation to an estate plan. Arnold and Isabel Kempton are generous donors who have decided to leave an estate gift to the Community Foundation. Their gift will impact poverty-related opportunities in Mecosta County in the future.

An estate gift is just one way to make a significant impact on Mecosta County, even if giving today is not a possibility. Including the Community Foundation in your estate plan allows you to support the community in many 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](mailto:kboven@facommunityfoundation.org) to discuss how to include us in your estate or make a gift today to benefit Mecosta County.







# 2023 financials

*Impact by the numbers*

TOTAL GIFTS	\$16,328
TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS	\$18,500
TOTAL GRANTS	\$48,705
Community grants	\$6,355
Donor advised/agency endowment/designated grants	\$42,350

*All data as of May 31, 2023*



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Fremont Area Community Foundation

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## community**action**

*The newsletter of Mecosta County Community Foundation*

[fcommunityfoundation.org/mccf](http://fcommunityfoundation.org/mccf)

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# Chair's note



Nothing makes us more appreciative to be in our community than summertime in Mecosta County. Seeing everyone enjoying the local parks, trails, and water is bound to put a smile on anyone's face. At the Community Foundation, we have certainly taken advantage of summer this year. We enjoyed visiting many of our grantees over the last few months, especially our camp-based grantees such as Earful of Fiddle and Rose Lake Youth Camp. In addition to visiting grantees and donors, you probably saw us at Mecosta County Fairgrounds auctioning off a harness for next year's Celebrity Sulky Race.

Recently, we finalized our spring grant round and mailed out checks to local nonprofit partners. Overall, the Community Foundation granted more than \$35,000 that will go towards events and programs that will make a huge difference throughout Mecosta County.

Our Philanthropic Services Committee has also been hard at work engaging with donors through various events and conversations. These events and conversations are a great opportunity to not only interact with donors but also to talk with prospective donors about the impact the Community Foundation is having on the area.

We are excited for you to read even more about what the Community Foundation has been up to in this newsletter. As always, we could do nothing without the continued support of our community in making Mecosta County a beautiful place to live, work, and play.

Respectfully,

Tom Tacia  
Board Chair