



# Connections

from our *Home* to Yours

HAMILTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION & AFFILIATES **SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2025**

## FROM *Suzy* TO *Big Mack* A JOURNEY OF IMPACT



"Mack" the bulldog emblem

Five years ago, thanks to a generous donor working through the Hamilton Community Foundation, United Pet Fund (UPF) received an Isuzu box truck, fondly named Suzy. She quickly became an essential part of UPF's mission, transporting pet food and critical supplies to animal rescues and shelters across the region.

Earlier this year, Suzy met her end after an unexpected highway detour led to unsafe road conditions. Thankfully, Dr. Zeke Zekoff, President and Founder of United Pet Fund, walked away from the accident unharmed.

Determined to keep moving forward, UPF purchased a larger replacement truck, Big Mack, to continue its work. When Dr. Zeke reached out to the Foundation requesting our logo for the new vehicle, wanting Suzy's legacy and our partnership to live on, his story moved us and our donor.

Hearing about the unexpected additional costs of the new truck, the original donor stepped up once again through the Foundation to help cover the gap. That support allowed UPF to stay focused on what matters most: delivering essential resources to the animals and organizations that rely on them.



United  
Pet  
Fund



And that mission is thriving. Now in its 15th year, United Pet Fund has distributed more than \$21 million in resources in just the past two years alone, supporting over 300 shelters, rescues, and advocacy groups across the Midwest and South. As a unique, volunteer-powered nonprofit, UPF continues to fill critical gaps by connecting those with goods and services to donate with those who need them most.

We're grateful to partner with donors who don't just keep nonprofits going, but help them grow stronger, mile after mile.



ROSS COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION



FAIRFIELD  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

CFNS  
ACCREDITED  
FOUNDATION

Hamilton  
Community  
Foundation  
Established 1951

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Hamilton Community Foundation  
319 N 3rd Street  
Hamilton, Ohio 45011



New Scholarship Highlight

FEEDING THE FUTURE

A story about scholarship, bbq, and bold dreams

Lee Corder has always believed food is about more than what's on the plate. It's about connection, care, and community. Whether at the grill or in the classroom, Lee has spent decades feeding others with smoked ribs, good stories, and life-changing guidance. Now, even in the face of a terminal cancer diagnosis, Lee is still giving.

Launched this year, the Lee Corder Culinary Scholarship will carry forward that legacy. Each year, the fund will support students pursuing careers in the culinary arts—not just those who want to cook, but those who want to serve. It will uplift young people who see food as a way to bring others together and give back to their communities.

"It wasn't just about setting up a scholarship," Lee shared. "It was about creating something my daughters and our whole family could be part of—something that will keep us connected to each other, to me, and to the values that matter: generosity, excellence, and joy."

For Lee, the joy of feeding others began with backyard BBQs and family recipes passed down from his mother. But it deepened over his 35-year career in education, especially during his 17 years leading Career Technical Education at Butler Tech.

"There, he helped young people discover their gifts and use them with purpose.

I've always loved watching someone light up when they realize they're good at something," he said. "Especially when that something can be shared."

The scholarship will be more than a financial gift. It will be a living reflection of Lee's belief that talent deserves support and that giving is a family tradition. His daughters will help guide the selection process in years to come, ensuring that each recipient carries forward not just skill, but heart.

With a goal of raising \$100,000 to endow the scholarship in perpetuity, the community is already beginning to rally. While Lee may not be here to meet every future recipient, his presence will be felt in smoky flavors, confident hands, and the kind of meals that linger in memory.

As Lee puts it: "You feed people with more than FOOD. You feed them with HEART."



SAVE THE DATE



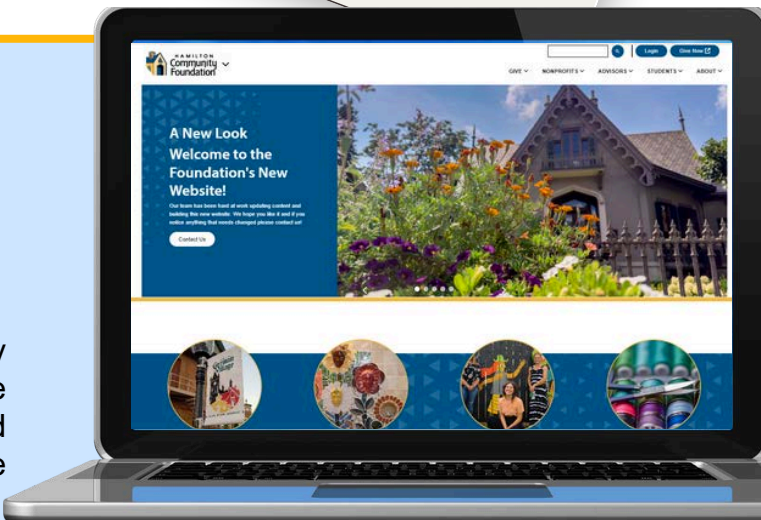
September 28 will mark the 7th and final Kat Walk, fittingly, as seven was Kat's favorite number. Organizers are pulling out all the stops to celebrate Kat, bring the community together, and end the event in unforgettable fashion. Stay tuned for registration details and a full schedule of the day's activities.

The Kat Walk is a 3K memorial walk created to honor the life of Katherine Schindler, a Badin High School student who died in 2019 following her struggle with mental health. Proceeds from the event support mental health organizations, helping to extend compassion, connection, and care to others in Kat's honor. The walk serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of mental health awareness, understanding, and support for others.

NEW WEBSITE LAUNCH

The Hamilton Community Foundation and its affiliates—the Fairfield Community Foundation and Ross Community Foundation—have launched brand-new websites!

Whether you're a longtime donor, a first-time scholarship seeker, a nonprofit looking for grant opportunities, or simply someone interested in giving back, these updated sites were created with you in mind. Each one is thoughtfully designed to serve as a go-to resource for starting a fund, applying for scholarships, exploring recent grants, and seeing the impact of local philanthropy. Take a moment to explore and discover how you can get involved and make a difference in your community.



Check out our new sites today!



# GROWING OUR TEAM

## Growing Our Impact

Communications Manager



### MEGHAN HARTMAN

**Passionate about storytelling**, Meghan's new role at the Foundation is to lead efforts to share the impact of our work—and that of our donors—across print, digital, and events. She also supports our Fairfield and Ross affiliates in their communications efforts.

A Liberty, Indiana native and Ball State grad, Meghan brings nearly a decade of marketing experience and a strong passion for building community connection. Outside of work, she enjoys concerts, running, reading, and spending time with her daughter and fiancé.

### JILL ROY



HIGHER Fund Impact Officer

**As the Foundation's new HIGHER Fund Impact Officer**, Jill has the opportunity to build connections and community in ways that reflect the very values the HIGHER Fund aims to instill: Honesty, Integrity, Gratitude, Humility, Empathy, and Respect. She brings to this role years of experience in operations and finance, a deep love for Hamilton, and a strong belief in what's possible when we lead with those values.

Born and raised on Hamilton's west side, Jill now lives in Fairfield Township with her husband and their blended family. She's excited for the chance to give back to the community that helped shape her.

## Meet HAMILTON'S HOMETOWNGUIDE



Photo Credit: Michael D. Pitman, Journal-News

Thanks to Foundation funding and Chamber leadership, the new Ambassador Program is officially underway. Its goal is simple: to help both locals and visitors feel welcome while exploring all that downtown Hamilton has to offer.

At the center of the program is Gail Barnett, Hamilton's first official ambassador. On weekends and during special events, you'll spot Gail riding through downtown in the Ambassador golf cart, ready to share restaurant menus, maps, Hamilton Guides, and helpful tips on where to eat, shop, and explore.

Whether you've lived in Hamilton your entire life, here for the day, or just discovering the city for the first time, this initiative offers a warm welcome and a helping hand, just one more way local organizations are working together to build a vibrant, connected community.

So next time you see the ambassador cart roll by, don't hesitate to wave hello and take advantage of everything downtown has to offer.

## The FUTURE STARTS HERE

This year's Scholarship Reception recognized more than 230 students from area schools throughout the county, each receiving a scholarship made possible by the generosity of donors who believe in the power of education and potential.

For the first time, the event was held at Spooky Nook Sports Champion Mill, providing a dynamic and inspiring space to honor the hard work and achievements of local students. Families, educators, and donors gathered to celebrate the moment marking not just a milestone for each student, but a shared commitment to the future of our region.

Scholarships were awarded through the Hamilton Community Foundation, along with our affiliates at the Fairfield Community Foundation and the Ross Community Foundation, making it a truly countywide celebration of promise, perseverance, and possibility.







# Ross Matters!

## class of 2025 Scholarship RECIPIENT

Ross High School graduate Kenneth Rakes was selected as the 2025 recipient of the Ross Community Foundation Scholarship—an honor that reflects his dedication, leadership, and service.



RCF Board with 2025 RCF Scholarship Recipient, Kenneth Rakes

Kenneth will be attending West Point Academy, where he plans to double major in Chemical Engineering and Business Administration. Finishing second in his class and earning a near-perfect ACT score, Kenneth also gave back in big ways by logging over 500 volunteer hours and helping secure more than \$75,000 in grant funding as the Butler County Coordinator for JEE Foods, a student-led nonprofit focused on reducing food waste and combating hunger.

In addition to his academic and community achievements, Kenneth was deeply involved in student life, serving as captain of the cross country and track teams and participating in DECA, National Honor Society, Running Rams, Student Athletic Leadership Team, Ross Snow Sports, and All Champions Day.

Congratulations to Kenneth on this well-earned honor, and we can't wait to see what the future holds!

## \$1 Million RAISED

POWERED BY DONORS WHO BELIEVE IN ROSS

*A Million Reasons to Thank Our Donors*  
The Ross Community Foundation has officially surpassed \$1 million raised for the Ross Community Impact Fund. This milestone marks a defining moment in the Foundation's young history and speaks to the strength and generosity of the Ross community.

Founded in 2022 through the vision of Martha and Dana Mehl, the Foundation began with an ambitious goal: raise \$500,000 in its first year. Thanks to an outpouring of community and donor support, that goal was not only met, but surpassed. Just a few short years later, the fund has grown beyond \$1 million.

More than \$90,000 has already been granted back into the community, supporting projects, programs, and partnerships that help Ross thrive. And that impact will only continue to grow.

"This milestone was achieved by the incredible generosity of our donors and is just the beginning, as the RCF Board continues to reach out to community members to contribute to the Impact Fund in order to meet the ever-growing needs of our communities," said Martha Mehl, Board Chair of the Ross Foundation.

This achievement reflects more than dollars raised; it reflects the trust and belief of donors who care deeply about their community. Because of that shared commitment, the Ross Community Impact Fund will continue to be a lasting resource for Ross today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

## COMMUNITY HARVEST CAMPAIGN

Every dollar makes a difference. By giving to the Ross Community Impact Fund, you're helping create real, lasting change right here at home. During the Community Harvest Campaign, 100% of your gift is invested back into the community, and giving levels let you see just how far your impact can go. It's all about one simple idea: **GIVE WHERE YOU LIVE.**



Save the Date  
**ROSS DONOR  
APPRECIATION  
AND BUSINESS  
MEETING**  
September 18, 2025



# Focus *on fairfield & fairfield Township*

## New Fund Highlights

### FEEDING FAIRFIELD *A future full of Hope*

Since 1997, the Fairfield Food Pantry has been a quiet force of compassion, providing emergency food and basic essentials to families within the Fairfield City School District. This year, they've taken an important step to ensure that support lasts for generations to come by establishing a fund with the Fairfield Community Foundation.

Open three days a week, the Pantry serves local residents with dignity and care, offering bags of food tailored to household size. Each visit may include breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, and toiletries when available. Every \$4 donated feeds a family of two for three days. Just \$10? A family of five. A gift of \$100 can go even further than most imagine.

With this new fund, the Pantry is building a more sustainable future, one where no neighbor goes hungry. You can help by making a gift to the Fairfield Food Pantry Fund, donating nonperishable items, volunteering your time, or hosting a food drive. Together, we can keep Fairfield fed and full of hope.



Did you spot the school supply donation bins around Fairfield this summer? They were part of something BIG, and it paid off in a huge way! This year's Fairfield City Schools Back-to-School Bash was their biggest ever, with over 1,500 backpacks stuffed with supplies given out to local students. That's 1,500 kids walking into school confident, prepared, and ready to shine!

"Our kids are worth it," said Kim Hauer, Assistant Superintendent and Co-Chair of the Fairfield Community Foundation. "We were honored to serve so many families and thrilled to help students head into the year prepared and confident. None of this would be possible without the incredible generosity of those who donated."

And here's the best part—this year, they launched the Back-to-School Bash Fund at the Fairfield Community Foundation to keep the magic going! With your support, the Bash can grow even bigger every year, making sure every Fairfield student starts school with the tools they need to succeed.

### *Honoring a Legacy of* **MISSION & SERVICE**



For generations, St. Clair Avenue Baptist Church has supported mission work both near and far. When financial challenges made it difficult to continue that support at the level they hoped for, the church responded by planting seeds for the future and creating the Legacy Missions Fund at the Foundation to ensure that important work could continue for years to come. This fund, rooted in love, generosity, and a deep commitment to service, was further strengthened by a meaningful gift from the estate of longtime members Roger and Judy Vennefron.

Their son, Aaron Vennefron, remembers how his parents quietly lived out their values by welcoming visiting missionaries into their home, offering encouragement and care, and leading efforts like the church's Faith Promise campaign. "Their lives reflected a deep commitment to missions and a heart for supporting those called to serve," Aaron shared. The Legacy Missions Fund now carries that same spirit forward, providing ongoing support for those doing mission work at home and abroad. It stands as a lasting tribute to a family's quiet impact, and to a church that continues to invest in a better world.



# Comparing

## Two Scenarios:

### WHY THE STEP-UP IN BASIS MATTERS

As you've watched the news about potential tax reform, a principle known as the "step-up in basis" might have caught your attention. Over the years, from time to time, draft legislation has proposed that this principle be changed or eliminated. Although tax law changes to eliminate the step-up in basis are not part of recently-introduced "death tax repeal" legislation, it's still a good idea to be aware of the potential implications on the charitable giving strategies in your estate plan.

The tax principle of "step-up in basis" means that the cost basis of inherited assets - like stocks held outside of retirement accounts and real property - will be **reset to their fair market value at the time of the owner's death**, effectively erasing any capital gains that accrued during lifetime. You and your advisors might have discussed this principle in deciding which assets to leave to a charity, such as your fund at the community foundation, in your estate plan, and which assets to leave to your heirs. The implications can be huge.

### Consider These Scenarios

#### IRA to kids, stock to charity

If you were to name your children as the beneficiaries of an IRA, and then provide for charitable gifts in your will or trust, your children will pay income tax on distributions from your IRA following your death. Assets passing under your will or trust, such as appreciated stock, get a step-up in basis, but if a charity is the ultimate beneficiary, it doesn't really matter because charities are not subject to tax.

Tax result? Normally less than ideal.

#### IRA to charity, stock to kids

If, instead, you name your fund as the beneficiary of your IRA, the community foundation pays no income tax. Then, any stock that passes to your children through your will or trust will receive a step-up in basis, meaning your kids can sell the stock and avoid capital gains tax on the appreciation during your lifetime.

Tax result? Generally very good!

Please reach out to the community foundation to learn more about leaving a legacy in your estate plan to support your favorite causes. We are happy to work with you and your advisors to maximize both the community impact and tax efficiency of your charitable gifts.

## YOUR Donor Services TEAM



## DISCOVER LOCAL NONPROFITS IN

### One Place

Looking to support a local cause but not sure where to begin? Whether you're interested in making a donation, volunteering your time, or simply learning more about the organizations making a difference in Butler County, the Hamilton Community Foundation's Nonprofit Directory is a great place to start.

This easy-to-use resource highlights nonprofits serving our region — what they do, who they serve, and how you can get involved. You can find it on our website under Nonprofits.

If you're part of a nonprofit, we'd love to include you! Just complete the Nonprofit Needs Assessment form on our website to be added to the directory.

Questions?

Contact Tracy Eads at [teads@hamiltonfoundation.org](mailto:teads@hamiltonfoundation.org).

## YOUTH PHILANTHROPY COMMITTEE



## Save the Date

### 2025 FOUNDATION ANNUAL MEETING

October 23, 2025 | 5-8pm



# Paving the Way ...

As we approach our 75th anniversary in 2026, we're taking time to look back at the road we've traveled by spotlighting the transformative projects and partnerships that have shaped Hamilton over the last few decades. From downtown revitalization to expanded public spaces, these milestones reflect the power of donor generosity, visionary leadership, and a shared commitment to progress.



2012

## The Mercantile Lofts

We issued a \$250,000 patient capital loan to stabilize three downtown buildings, saving them from demolition and transforming them into modern apartments and storefronts. Completed in 2012, the Lofts became a catalyst for downtown revitalization.



2001

## Great Miami River Trail

Originally celebrated as one of six commemorative gifts for our 50th anniversary in 2001, this project funded the northern extension of the trail from the Fitton Center to Rentschler Forest MetroPark. Completed in 2015, the trail is now named in honor of Dave Belew who helped champion the project.



2005

## Courtyard by Marriott

When the downtown Hamiltonian Hotel closed in 2005, the Foundation stepped in raising over \$6.6 million and leading a \$12 million renovation project. The hotel reopened as a Courtyard by Marriott, bringing new life to downtown Hamilton.

2008

## Artspace Hamilton

In 2008, we helped launch Artspace Hamilton with an initial \$125,000 grant and rallied donors to contribute an additional \$400,000. Opened in 2015, it now features 42 affordable artist apartments, gallery space, and storefronts, and was honored by Heritage Ohio as the Best Public/Private Partnership of the year.



2012

## CORE Hamilton

Launched with First Financial Bank, US Bank, and the City, CORE Hamilton was created to fund key downtown projects and restore critical buildings. Success stories include 150 High Street (former Elder-Beerman), 254 High Street (Sara's House), and 302 Main Street (InsideOut Studios).



2016

## Marcum Park

The Foundation facilitated a landmark gift from the Marcum Family to create Marcum Park, complete with an endowment for its permanent care. Spanning six acres with fountains, green space, and the beloved RiversEdge amphitheater, it sparked major downtown development and now serves as Hamilton's "downtown backyard."

Celebrating **75**  
nearly  
Years of Community  
**IMPACT**

These stories mark just a few of the milestones along our journey. As 2026 approaches, we remain focused on honoring our legacy, and paving the way for an even brighter future for Hamilton.

Explore the full timeline, expanded stories, and lasting impact on our newly redesigned website at [www.hamiltonfoundation.org](http://www.hamiltonfoundation.org).



# Unrestricted Giving

## KEEPS OUR COMMUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

### Building Resiliency in Youth (BRiY)

with 11N5

Supporting youth mental health starts with education, connection, and early intervention. BRiY partners with schools to provide tailored programming that helps students, educators, and caregivers recognize mental health challenges, reduce stigma, and build lifelong skills for emotional well-being. By embedding these tools into school culture, BRiY creates lasting change. This grant supports their continued work and growing reach across our region.

\$50k

Strong communities are built on connection — where neighbors support one another, children have safe places to grow and play, and families can access the resources they need to thrive. Whether it's putting food on the table, repairing a home, launching youth programs, or adding small comforts to shared spaces, these efforts remind us that even modest investments can have lasting impact. Together, we're building a stronger, healthier community, one project at a time.

\$10k



### Compassion Food Project

with Butler County Educational Service Center

Food insecurity affects thousands of families across Butler County, impacting student success, family stability, and overall health. The Compassion Food Project helps meet this need by delivering fresh, nutritious food and personal care items to families served by the Butler County Educational Service Center. From mini school pantries to boxes sent home before breaks, this effort ensures students have access to meals year-round, and families face one less barrier to well-being.

### Keeping Families Safe and Stable

with Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

Stable housing and steady income are essential to a family's well-being, yet rising housing costs and eviction risks continue to impact low-income households across our region. Legal Aid works to prevent housing loss and economic instability by providing legal support for families facing eviction, foreclosure, or barriers to employment and public benefits. This grant supports their efforts to keep families housed, supported, and on the path to stability.

\$20k

### Drinking Fountain

for Morgan Township Park



Morgan Township Park welcomes thousands of visitors each year to enjoy its walking trail, playground, and open green space. A new outdoor drinking fountain with a built-in dog bowl will soon be installed to provide clean, accessible water for both people and pets. This small but meaningful addition will help keep visitors safe and hydrated during the hot summer months, making the park even more enjoyable for all.

\$5k

### College Access

with BottomLine

A college degree can change the course of a student's life — opening doors to opportunity, stability, and well-being. Bottom Line supports first-generation, college-bound students from under-resourced communities with one-on-one guidance, application support, and career preparation. Their work removes barriers and builds brighter futures. This grant supports Bottom Line's efforts to help local students not just get into college, but graduate and succeed.

\$50k

### Home Repairs and Modifications

with People Working Cooperatively, Inc.

A safe, stable home is essential, but for many low-income homeowners in Greater Hamilton, urgent repairs are out of reach. People Working Cooperatively steps in to meet that need, completing critical home repairs and accessibility modifications from leaky roofs to broken furnaces. This grant helps meet growing demand and ensures more families can remain safely in the homes they love.

\$60k



Scan Here

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GRANTS IMPACTING OUR COMMUNITY, VISIT THE "OUR IMPACT" SECTION UNDER THE "ABOUT" MENU.

## Thank You to all of our Board Members!

### Hamilton Community Foundation

Robert Long - Chair  
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Jason Crank - Treasurer  
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Catherine Evans  
Vaden "Woody" Fitton  
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Jared Dinnesen  
Justin Krueger  
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### Our mission

Building a better community through creative philanthropy, vision and leadership.

### Our vision

Continue to be the trusted resource for growing philanthropy and leading change to improve our community.

