

# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

## 2023

20

**MATCHING CHARITABLE INTENTIONS  
WITH COMMUNITY NEEDS**

23



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

---

GRAND RAPIDS AREA



# 2023 BOARD CHAIR NOTE

*Dear Donors, Friends, and Supporters,*

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride in the remarkable achievements that GRACF has accomplished together with you, our philanthropic community. Your generosity and support have enabled our community-focused foundation to continue its mission of making a meaningful impact on the lives of countless individuals and organizations in northern Minnesota through charitable donations.

In 2023, our foundation distributed over \$1.6 million in grants and scholarships. We awarded over \$1.3 million in 662 grants, empowering numerous nonprofit organizations to further their missions and strengthen their communities. Additionally, we provided \$299,000 in scholarships to 158 deserving students through 199 awards in ten school districts, helping to pave the way for their future success.

The continued generosity of our donors is truly inspiring. We received over \$2.4 million from 1,975 donations made by 1,090 donors. This incredible support not only highlights the trust and confidence you have in our foundation but also underscores our shared commitment to fostering impactful change for the communities we serve across northern Minnesota.

Our assets under management, your philanthropic contributions, have grown to over \$31,000,000, positioning GRACF to continue our efforts in supporting the needs and aspirations of the communities we serve. This financial strength allows us to plot a course for the future with optimism and to explore new opportunities for making a lasting difference.

As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to our core values of compassion, collaboration, and community. Together, we will continue to address the challenges our communities face and support projects that inspire progress and growth.

I am also thrilled to share that as we closed out 2023, GRACF is excited to celebrate our 30th anniversary in 2024. This momentous occasion marks three decades of dedicated service and community impact. We are excited to celebrate this anniversary with you, our valued donors and supporters, and look forward to continued success in our mission and growth of our foundation in the years to come. Please consider attending our Harvest Fun(d) Fest on October 11, 2024!

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey. Your contributions, whether through donations, volunteerism, or advocacy, are the foundation of our success. We are excited about the future and confident that, with your continued support, we will achieve even greater milestones.

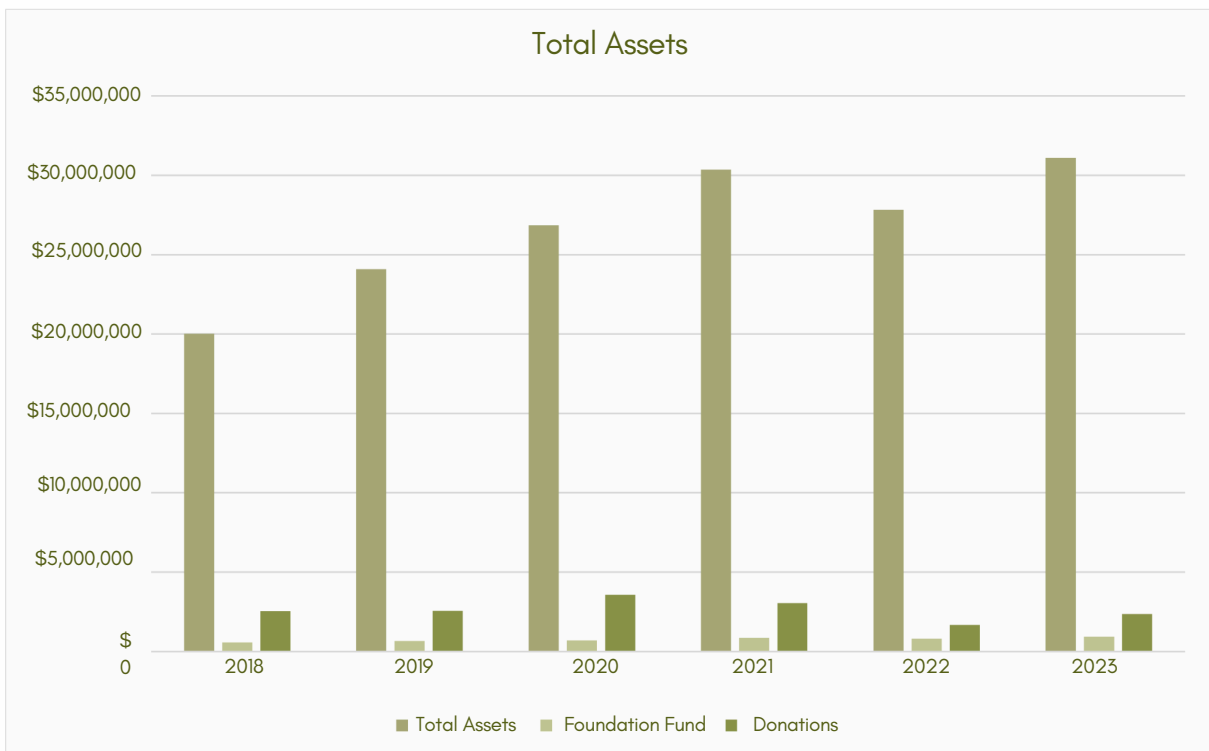
On a personal note, it has been a true honor to be the third Wilcox family member to serve as Board Chair. I appreciate the comradery and the trust that all have placed in me. Please continue to remember GRACF in your estate planning and philanthropic plans.

**WITH DEEPEST GRATITUDE,**

**JULIE WILCOX**  
**2023 BOARD CHAIR**

# SERVING THE COMMUNITY

**Over the past 30 years, the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation has grown its assets to an impressive \$31 million. More impressive is that almost the same amount, more than \$30 million, was granted back into our communities, including \$1.9 million in scholarships, \$1.8 million in crisis funding, and over \$250,000 in cancer crisis funding.**



\*The above presented financial information was extracted from 2023 internal financial statements and has not yet been audited. The most current annual audit and Form 990 are available by calling us at 218-999-9100. You can also access audit information and Form 990 online at Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)).



# GRACF

## 2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Julie Wilcox**  
Chair



**Shannon Benolken**  
Vice Chair



**Sarah Anderson**  
Treasurer



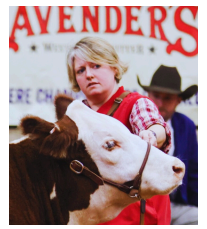
**Diane Larson**  
Secretary



**Kristian Myers**  
Past Chair



**Christina Andersen**



**Jamie Brown**



**Elena Cowan**



**Kyle Erickson**



**Peter McDermott**



**Isaac Meyer**



**Jerry Ophoven**



**Josh Skelton**



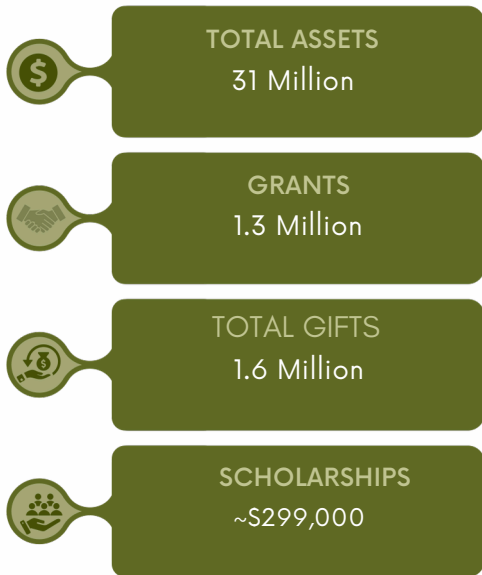
**Roy Smith**

## GARDEN GALA

We are deeply grateful for the generous support of our donors and sponsors, whose contributions made last year's Garden Gala event a success. Your commitment to the Foundation helps us continue our work and make a meaningful impact in our community.

Sponsors: RBC Wealth Management, Grand Rapids State Bank, Mangseth Painting, Park State Bank, Kari Hutchins/North DQ, Dermatology Professionals, CliftonLarsonAllen, and Elena and Dave Cowan.





# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

The Itasca County Sharing Fund, established by the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation (GRACF) in 2005, has played a pivotal role in providing crisis assistance to community members since that time. The fund issues grants for essential needs like housing, transportation, and utilities. In 2023, GRACF distributed \$121,342 in grants to support individuals facing hardships.

In 2023, GRACF collaborated with local partners to evaluate the management of these crucial funds. The consensus was that First Call For Help 211—an organization with extensive expertise in community aid and crisis management—would be the ideal steward of these resources. Consequently, as of January 1, 2024, the GRACF has entrusted First Call 211 with the oversight of crisis funding.

This strategic shift is designed to improve the efficiency, transparency, and overall impact of the funds, ensuring they continue to meet our community's needs effectively. First Call 211's deep understanding of the available crisis funding will further this goal.

## CRISIS FUNDING UPDATE



While GRACF has handed over the day-to-day management, it will continue annual crisis funding through several funds: the Itasca County Sharing Fund, the Endowed Sharing Fund, the CASE Fund, the Veterans Emergency Support Fund, and the Restore a Smile Fund. These funds will be allocated to First Call 211 for distribution.

Nonprofit agencies in the Greater Itasca Area are encouraged to continue submitting applications on behalf of individuals in crisis via the First Call 211 website at [www.firstcall211.net](http://www.firstcall211.net).



supported in part by  
**Blandin Foundation**

The Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation extends a special thank you to the Blandin Foundation for providing substantial support for the Itasca County Sharing Fund through the years, which has had a significant impact on our community.

# 2023 ANNUAL GRANT CYCLE

## \$154,000 awarded in 44 grants to local nonprofits



PHOTO: Susanna Elsen and Graham Elsen, United Way of 1000 Lakes Stuff the Bus Program



PHOTO: Ray J, Dianna C, Cate E, Nicole S, and Tyler D of Target, Grand Rapids, a Stuff the Bus Partner

The annual grant cycle is a journey of community empowerment and positive change. In 2023, the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation (GRACF) awarded over \$154,000 in 44 grants to area nonprofits and projects in the Greater Itasca Area. Of this amount, \$34,000 came from donor-advised fund holders.

One initiative funded in 2023 was the United Way of 1000 Lakes Stuff the Bus School Supplies Program. This program addresses equity in schools by providing students with the necessary tools for success. Backpacks filled with classroom-specific supplies support parents and remove barriers, ensuring students are prepared for school. The program serves students in Bigfork, Cohasset, Coleraine, Deer River, Grand Rapids, Hill City, Nashwauk, Pengilly, and Warba.

In 2023, over 300 backpacks, valued at more than \$24,000, were distributed to students in grades K-12. The \$2500 grant from GRACF helped the United Way serve more families as the need grows.

“The initiative is part of United Way’s Ready Kids, Resilient Families pillars, supporting children and families throughout the educational process,” said Kim Brink Smith, United Way Executive Director. “By providing these essential resources, the initiative empowers students and supports the financial stability of families.”

Mindy Nuhring, GRACF Executive Director, added, “As stated earlier, many grants awarded through the annual grant cycle are from donor-advised funds managed by the Community Foundation. Donors are actively involved in awarding funds to applicants. Thank you to all donors who help improve the quality of life in the Greater Itasca Area.”

## New Funds in 2023

**Adam Johnson Memorial Fund--Art for All Fund--Bryan Schlict Agency, Inc. of American Family Insurance Scholarship--Donald R. and Betty T. Olson Community Impact Fund--Healthy Financial Futures Program Fund--Jack Huhta Good Character Award--Itasca Vintage Car Club Scholarship--Kiwanis Daybreakers Fund--Kurt L. (Buzz) & Jean A. Samuelson Scholarship--Mary Snustad Preschool Scholarship Fund--Northern Star Cooperative Community Stewardship Fund--Peter and Charlotte McDermott Fund--Sally and David Atlas Scholarship--Will and Bernie Backes Fund**

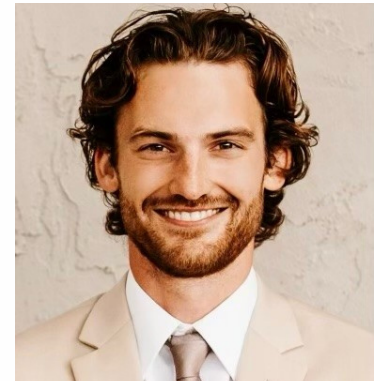
# ADAM JOHNSON MEMORIAL FUND ESTABLISHED

---

Adam Johnson grew up playing hockey in Hibbing, Minnesota, and was a promising player who went on to play hockey at the University of Minnesota-Duluth and became an assistant captain there. After college he played professional hockey with the Pittsburgh Penguins and was still playing professional hockey when his life was cut short due to a neck injury. Adam was loved and admired by his family, friends, teammates, and coaches. His hockey coaches have talked of Adam's integrity and that he was not only an exceptional teammate, but a truly special person.

In honor of Adam, his loved ones set up the Adam Johnson Memorial Fund at the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation. The mission of this fund is to honor the life of Adam by continuing to support the passions and interests that Adam valued the most and to keep his legacy alive. There are plans for an academic scholarship and hockey camp scholarships. Adam's loved ones hope to continue their efforts and to expand their support of the community. There will be an annual golf tournament in Hibbing and this fall there will be an Adam Johnson Memorial UMD Men's Bulldogs Hockey game at 5 o'clock on November 23, 2024. That night there will be an in-person auction as well as an online auction featuring warm up hockey jerseys worn by the players, items donated by current professional UMD alumni, and more.

You can help honor Adam's legacy of passion, dedication, his love for the game of hockey and help him continue to inspire others by donating to the Adam Johnson Memorial Fund. Donate online at the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation's website [gracf.org](http://gracf.org) or mail or drop off a donation to the GRACF office.



ADAM JOHNSON

---

## ALMOST \$300,000 IN SCHOLARSHIPS WENT TO 199 STUDENTS IN 2023



LOGAN KUSCHEL

Scholarships are vital for students like Logan Kuschel, a 2019 Grand Rapids High School graduate. With scholarships from the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation and WDIO of Duluth, Logan completed an AA degree at Itasca Community College and pursued Mass Communication at MNSU. Active in campus life, her plans were disrupted by the pandemic, leading her to online studies and a leadership role at Target in Grand Rapids. This experience sparked her passion for communication, prompting her to pursue a Master's in Communication Sciences and Disorders. Accepted into MNSU's Speech Pathology Master's Program, Logan's goal is to become a speech pathologist, addressing the significant need for such services in rural areas. Reflecting on her journey, Logan credits scholarships for providing invaluable connections and opportunities, shaping her career path. The Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation, through its donors, fosters a culture of education in the Greater Itasca Area and offers approximately 200 scholarships, supporting students' educational aspirations and contributing to societal progress. Applications open each year on January 1st at [gracf.org](http://gracf.org). Logan's story exemplifies how scholarships can fund education and fuel dreams, resilience, and a brighter future. For a full list of scholarships visit the GRACF website.



STEVE WILCOX

# IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL COME

You may not remember “Shoeless Joe Jackson”? Joe was an American outfielder who played Major League Baseball in the early 1900’s. If not, you may recall the 1989 sports fantasy film, FIELD OF DREAMS. Iowa farmer, Ray Kinsella, is walking through his cornfield one evening when he hears a voice whispering, “If you build it, they will come.”

In the fall of 1991 Todd Driscoll of the Grand Rapids based Blandin Foundation called on me to discuss the merits of a community foundation. A community foundation could offer potential donors the opportunity to make the Grand Rapids area a better place to live. We talked about the implications of being perceived as competition to existing organizations, the additional responsibilities of the volunteer leadership of the community, and the need, over a long period of time, to communicate the opportunities that would come as a result of having a community foundation for the Grand Rapids/Itasca area.

I had experience locally serving with the Itasca Community College Foundation and the YMCA, existing endowments. The more I thought about it, the more a community foundation made sense—a winner for the area appealing to donors, grant recipients and organizational efficiency on top of it. “If you build it, they will come.”

Beginning in February 1992, informational meetings were held concerning the potential for a community foundation in the Grand Rapids area.

Twenty-three people attended to discuss the need for a community foundation, whether or not there were those in the community who would make gifts to such a foundation and what relationship the new organization might have with the Blandin Foundation and its’ robust 50 years of giving history. The group concluded there was a need to create an opportunity for public spirited donors, with different visions and different charitable priorities whose gifts could enhance the community in new ways.

It was generally agreed the capital or deferred gifts, with no annual membership solicitation, would not impact the current agencies which needed annual membership support from donors in the community. The gifts we seek today are the seeds for future philanthropy.

Every successful enterprise needs a champion and Todd Driscoll was our navigator. Todd indicated the potential support of the Blandin Foundation and also declared that he was willing to commit approximately 25% of his time to organizational support. A task force was formed with 15 community All Stars: Warren Anderson, Charles P. Driscoll, Rick Glorvigen, Susan Hawkinson, John Licke, Jane Reif, Wendy Roy, Tom Saxhaug, Mary Streufert, Barbara Swentkoske, Ken Lundgren, Wayne Mills, Kent Nyberg, Anne R. Welliver and Steve Wilcox. I was selected to chair the group. Jim Hoolihan, Mayor of Grand Rapids and Blandin Foundation Board member, Marty Licke, ICC Foundation and Leonard Wilkening, Minnesota Foundation Board member, acted in an ex-officio capacity providing valuable perspective,

by **STEVE WILCOX**





Second and third meetings were held in May and September of 1992. Holly Sampson from the Duluth-Superior Area Foundation came to discuss the benefits of affiliation. Our group felt there was an independent “can do” spirit in Grand Rapids that pointed to creating a stand-alone community foundation.

At the fifth and decisive meeting in November 1992, the Task Force voted to proceed with the formation of a community foundation in Grand Rapids. At the next December 11, 1992, gathering, the 15-member board was ratified. Tasks such as writing the articles and bylaws, mission and goals, future board members, committees, perspective donors, operating budget, marketing, and accounting followed.

The Blandin Foundation announced in January 1993 that a Blandin-administered grant of \$25,000 over two years to support planning and start-up costs had been approved.

In February 1993, John Licke reported the Articles/Bylaws Committee had started to work but was waiting for a mission statement. At this meeting it was agreed that the geographic area would be described as the “Itasca County area” to give a more inclusive feeling. Director and Officer’s Liability insurance was discussed and approved once we were playing ball.

At the March 19, 1993, meeting, information on TracStar, an accounting system, was distributed. The mission of the organization was introduced: the mission of the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation was to provide opportunities for individuals and organizations who wish to invest in their community to improve the quality of life in the Grand Rapids area.

## The goals were reviewed and proposed as:

- 1. To be of service to donors who wish to invest in the community and distribute income from gifts in accordance with the donor’s wishes,*
- 2. To manage charitable gifts in a prudent manner for a long-term benefit of the community,*
- 3. To assist area organizations to build their endowment resource,*
- 4. To assemble a diverse and knowledgeable board of trustees to govern the Foundation,*
- 5. To provide leadership, where appropriate, to address important community needs or pursue progressive new opportunities,*
- 6. To serve individual donors and communities in the greater Grand Rapids area.*

On April 16, 1993, the mission and goals were officially approved. It was moved and approved to establish the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation as a 501(c)(3) without affiliation. On May 21, 1993, the nominating committee recommended election of the incorporating/first directors. Articles of Incorporation were approved and filed by Warren Anderson with the Secretary of State.

On June 25, 1993, Bylaws were approved. Rick Glorvigen filed the application with the IRS for tax exempt status. A slate of officers for the current fiscal year to serve until February 1994 was voted on and approved: Steve Wilcox, President; Ken Lundgren, Vice President; Susan Hawkinson, Secretary; Warren Anderson, Treasurer.

In August 1993, the 501 (c)(3) application was submitted. On September 17, 1993, Rick Glorvigen reported on the TracStar Foundation accounting system. At the November 19, 1993, the nominating committee was asked to canvas current board members and nominate up to eight additional members.

On December 17, 1993, the board approved an outline of a fee schedule paralleling that used by the Central Minnesota Community Foundation. Mary Streufert reported on term limits for board members and implementing one, two, and three, year terms for continuity. By 1994 we were ready for opening day.



WENDY ROY, first GRACF Executive Director

It was my great privilege and pleasure to chair the Community Foundation Task Force and serve as its first president. Nothing could have been accomplished without the energy, commitment and wise counsel of the members of the board. The board is the engine and wheels of the Foundation. Hats off to succeeding board members over the past 29 years for their valued contributions to the growth and success of the organization. We've been fortunate to have had solid Executive Directors, Wendy Roy, Chris Fulton, Susan Lynch, and Mindy Nuhring implementing and guiding Board policy.

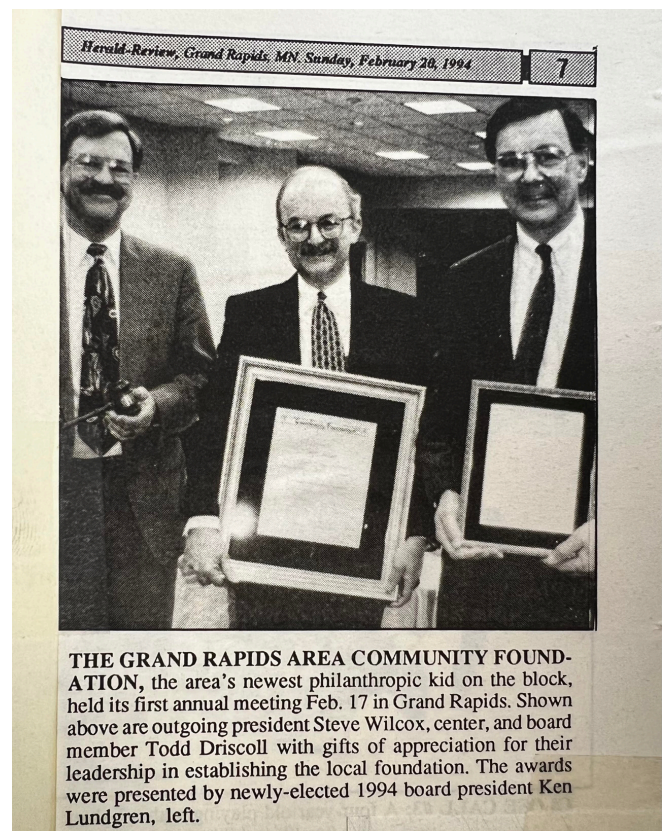
These days my contact with GRACF involves my investigation and implementation of donor advised funds. Donor advised funds allow charitably inclined individuals to disconnect their income tax planning strategies from their charitable gifting goals. Contributions made to a donor advised fund are deductible immediately, but the fund can be held, invested and distributed to charities later. In addition, donor advised funds provide great flexibility for distribution timing, investment growth opportunities, the potential for anonymity in gifting, and long-term legacy planning to ensure their intended charitable organizations receive grants even after their passing.

From my first annual report, March 16, 1994-

"As I look back to 1994 and beyond, I know the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation will be a good steward, a leader in the community and a listener to the wishes of donors and those who have creative ideas for improving the quality of life in the Grand Rapids area."

Thirty years later GRACF has \$31,000,000 in assets and has distributed \$30,000,00 in grants and scholarships - a remarkable record of donor generosity, community need, and organizational performance.

Sounds to me like "Mission Accomplished."  
"If you build it, they will come."



Steve Wilcox is a founding member, passionate supporter, and generous donor to the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation. Thank you to Steve for his words and his service to the community.



# *Seeds of Change*

## **ANNUAL ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN**

### **WHY JOIN THIS CAMPAIGN?**

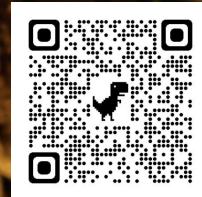
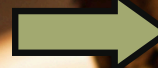
The Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation (GRACF) is celebrating 30 years of service to the community in 2024 and is excited to continue to have an impact through the Seeds of Change Campaign which supports the Foundation and local nonprofits. Everyone can help plant a seed, no matter the size of the donation, and make a tangible impact on our area and the sustainability of GRACF and its long-term investment in the community.

### **HOW TO DONATE**

You can participate as a business or individual and donate with a recurring donation or a one-time donation. Donate online on the Seeds of Change Page or the QR Code to the right.

- SEED SUPPORTER: \$ 360/year (\$30/month)
- SAPLING STARTER: \$1,200/year (\$100/month)
- BLOOM BUDDY: \$3,000/year (\$250/month)
- HARVEST HERO: \$6,000/year (\$500/month)

**DONATE NOW**



## **HARVEST FUN(D) FEST**

**OCTOBER 11 | 5:15 PM | BARN IN THE WOODS**

*TICKETS Available now! Go to [gracf.org](http://gracf.org) and click on the Seeds of Change page or QR Code to the right.*



**Non-Profit Project Video Presentations Cocktail Reception, Dinner & Live Music!**

*Attendee Voting + Winner Announced at the Harvest Fun(d) Fest!*

*From tiny acorns, mighty oaks do grow.*

**DONATE NOW**

218-999.9100

[gracf.org/donate](http://gracf.org/donate) to  
Seeds of Change Fund

# CANCER CRISIS FUNDING AT THE FOUNDATION



There is a growing need in the Greater Itasca Area for cancer crisis funds. GRACF manages two cancer crisis funds: Itasca Area Cancer Crisis Fund and the Blandin Employees for Life Cancer Crisis Fund. Since the inception of these two funds, 2010 and 2014, they have given over \$250,000 to help families with expenses due to receiving cancer treatments.

Over the past few years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of requests for help through our cancer crisis funds. In 2023, these funds gave out close to \$40,000 to community members. This surge in use of these funds reflects the growing need within our community for assistance during challenging times. With this increase in demand comes a greater need of resources. These funds rely on the continued generosity of donors to ensure that these funds can keep providing vital support to those who need it most. Both fund committees are resolute in making sure they can keep giving what community members need into the future. Contributions can be made to GRACF online, in person, or by mail.

## GREAT TAILS ANIMAL RESCUE BUILDING UPDATE



We are pleased to provide an update on the Great Tails Animal Rescue (GTAR) Building Fund/Project. The GTAR Committee has been actively collaborating with a local drafts person to develop building plans, which will soon be sent to local contractors for the bidding process. Additionally, they are working with local excavators to obtain quotes for site preparation. A banner will be placed at the site, located in Cohasset Industrial Park on Dovetail Boulevard, so the community can see the site and keep informed of the progress.

GTAR will provide monthly updates on their Facebook page and website at [www.greatailanimalrescue.com](http://www.greatailanimalrescue.com) for those interested in following their progress. The building fund, managed by the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation (GRACF), currently stands at \$1.3 million. While this amount allows the project to commence, additional funds are needed to complete the building. Contributions can be made to GRACF online, in person, or by mail.

**Ready to support the community through a fund here at GRACF? Just scan the QR code to the right to make a quick and easy donation—because every bit of support makes a big difference. Seeds of change!**



**Just search for the fund of your choice!**

# COMMUNITY FUNDS

There are five area Community Funds plus the McGregor Lakes Area Foundation that enable citizens and businesses to contribute to their local communities. Each Fund is managed by an advisory committee of volunteers who oversee grants for various programs and activities within their communities. A percentage of annual earnings from the invested endowment fund are granted to local non-profit organizations, providing charitable support to area residents. The Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation serves as the financial managing agent for these Community Funds. In 2023, these Community Funds granted over \$95,000 back into their communities.

The Deer River Area Community Fund includes areas within and around Deer River School District 317.

The Greater Itasca Area Community Fund serves Bigfork, Blackduck, Cohasset, Grand Rapids, Northome, Remer, Warba, and all other townships and cities within School District 318.

The Greenway Area Community Fund serves Coleraine, Bovey, Taconite, LaPrairie, Marble, Calumet, Pengilly, and the Townships of Trout Lake, Greenway, Lawrence Lake, and Nashwauk.

The Hill City Area Community Fund serves Jacobson, Swartara, Palisade, Hill City, and Spang Township.

The Nashwauk Area Community Fund serves Nashwauk, Nashwauk Township, Buck Lake, Pengilly, Swan Lake, Keewatin, and Goodland Township.

The McGregor Lakes Area Community Foundation covers areas similar to the McGregor School District.

**Since these funds were established in 2017, they've awarded over \$740,000 in grants back into their communities.**



## THANK YOU!

We would like to thank the community for their partnership, generosity, and support which continue to empower the Community Foundation to make a lasting impact in our communities.

The Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation has been connecting donors' charitable intentions to community needs for 30 years. For more information or to donate, visit our website at [gracf.org](http://gracf.org) or schedule a visit by calling (218) 999-9100.



Mindy Nuhring, Executive Director  
Lara Mlinar, Office Manager  
Lori Laliberte-Ross, Program Administrator



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

GRAND RAPIDS AREA

**350 NW 1st Avenue, Suite E**

Grand Rapids, MN 55744

218.999.9100

[www.gracf.org](http://www.gracf.org)

[info@gracf.org](mailto:info@gracf.org)

## GRACF Survey

*Start here*



**We value your input and want to ensure that our work aligns with the needs and interests of our community. By scanning this QR code, you'll have the opportunity to participate in a brief survey.**

**Your feedback will help us improve the Annual Report and guide the future direction of our Community Foundation. We appreciate your time and insights as we work together to strengthen our community.**