

# Annual Report



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  
GRAND RAPIDS AREA



2024





#### CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Diane Larson, Chair  
 Jamie Brown, Vice Chair  
 Peter McDermott, Treasurer  
 Christina Andersen, Secretary  
 Shannon Benolken, Past Chair  
 Elena Cowan  
 Amanda Dick  
 Corinne Ivanca  
 Megan MacDonell  
 Jerry Ophoven  
 Roy Smith  
 Jared Whight

#### STAFF

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



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[gracf.org/contact](https://gracf.org/contact)

Donors, Friends & Supporters—

**A**s we reflect on 2024, we are filled with pride and gratitude for all we accomplished together during a landmark year. This year marked the 30th anniversary of the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation—a meaningful milestone that gave us the opportunity to celebrate three decades of impact, partnership, and generosity in service to the people and places of northern Minnesota.

Throughout the year, we were honored to recognize the community members, fundholders, volunteers, and nonprofits that have shaped our story since 1994. Together, we celebrated our history while continuing to invest in the future.

One of the highlights of the year was the launch of our Seeds of Change annual campaign. This new initiative not only raised critical support for our Foundation Fund but also celebrated the incredible work of area nonprofits. Through public events, storytelling, and community participation, the campaign brought visibility to local organizations and reinforced our belief that lasting change begins at the grassroots level—when neighbors come together in support of one another.

Thanks to your continued generosity, we supported meaningful projects across the Greater Itasca Area through grants, scholarships, and community partnerships. The impact of your giving is reflected throughout this report, and we remain deeply grateful for the trust and support of our donors.

We also took time in 2024 to look ahead by developing a three-year strategic plan that will guide our work through 2027. The plan focuses on growing our impact, strengthening operations, and expanding opportunities for giving. We've already started to implement the plan, and we want to thank all who helped shape this mission.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to being a trusted resource and partner—connecting generosity to need and strengthening the fabric of our communities. Thank you for being part of this journey and for all the ways you continue to support the work of the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation.

With appreciation and optimism,



**MINDY NUHRING**  
 Executive Director



**SHANNON BENOLKEN**  
 2024 Chair  
 GRACF Board of Directors

**We strive to build a stronger community by mobilizing generosity around the needs of the people in the greater Itasca area.**

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*Mission*

**Generosity gives everyone the opportunity to thrive.**

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*Vision*

## **Integrity**

We do what's right — legally and morally.

## **Trust**

We earn confidence through demonstrated actions.

## **Stewardship**

We watch over, maintain, and accept full responsibility for managed funds and Foundation operations.

## **Collaboration**

We embrace the value of partnerships and shared input.

## **Compassion**

We care about our community members and respect their individual differences, diversity, and opinions.

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*Core Values*

## **A Vision for the Future** 2025–2027 Strategic Plan

We partnered with consultant, Vicki Pugh of Advancement Experts, to develop a bold, vision-based strategic plan that will guide our work from 2025 to 2027. This plan reflects the voices of our board, staff, and community.

As we celebrate 30 years of community impact, this plan positions us for an even stronger future. With clearly defined priorities and objectives, it sets the stage to increase visibility, grow resources, deepen our impact, and align staffing and governance with the Foundation's growth.

By 2027, we aim to expand fundraising efforts, achieve greater financial sustainability, strengthen board and staff engagement, and enhance our role as a trusted partner in serving the Greater Itasca Area.

We've already begun putting the plan into action, and we're grateful to everyone who helped shape this vision for the future.

# BECAUSE OF YOU

Every number tells a story. In 2024, we continued to connect generosity with need—fueling scholarships, supporting nonprofits, and strengthening communities across Itasca County and beyond. The data on these pages reflects the tangible difference your support makes each day.

# 2.5k

Donations

# 1,208

Total Donors

# \$2.3M

Dollars in Grants

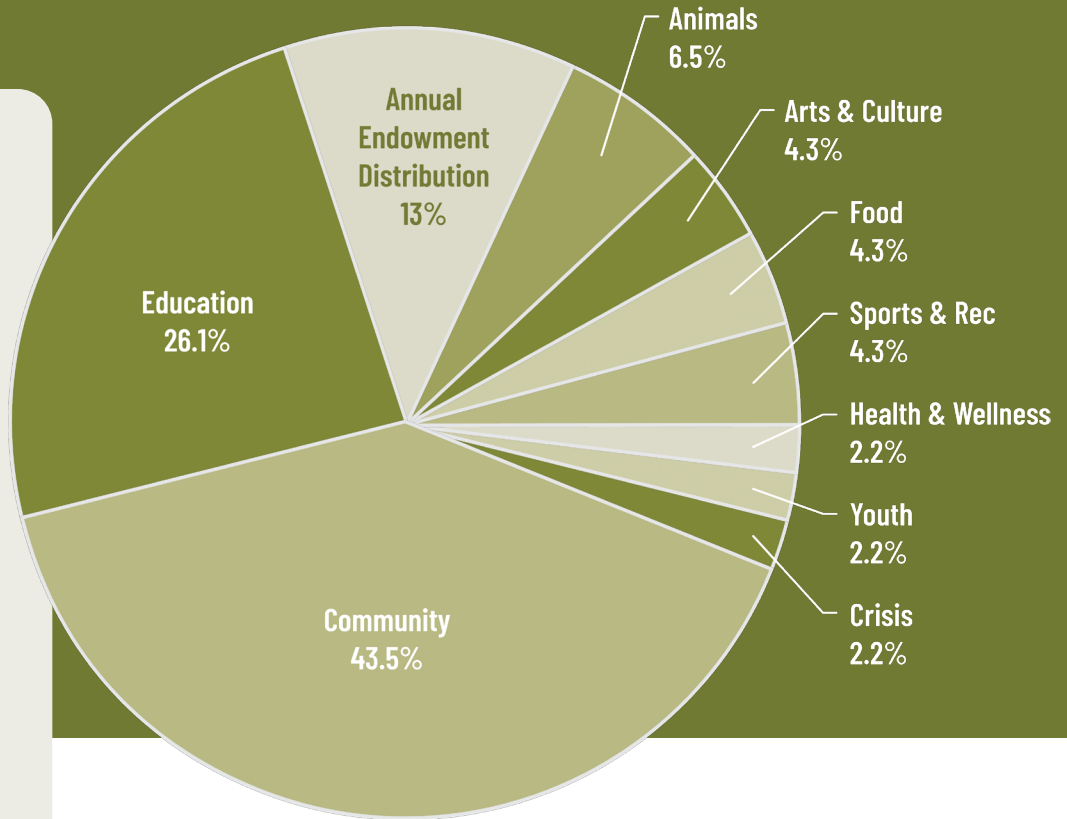
# 567

Grants

## NEW FUNDS

- + Adam Johnson Memorial Fund
- + Blue Heron Scholarship Fund
- + Club Mesabi Fund
- + Eric Northard Memorial Travel Scholarship
- + Essentia Health - Future in Healthcare Scholarship
- + Foster Hope Scholarship Fund
- + Free Range Food Co-Op Fund
- + GRAHA Fund
- + Grand Rapids Area Soccer Club Fund
- + The Great Itasca Giveback
- + Jesse Davis Legacy Scholarship
- + Mobility Mania goMARTI Expansion Fund
- + Mobility Mania Voucher Program
- + Morgan's Legacy Fund
- + Patricia Louise Sala Endowment
- + Paul Bunyan Communications Employee Benevolence Fund
- + Popple River Fund
- + Seeds of Change Fund

Visit [gracf.org/donate/funds](https://gracf.org/donate/funds) for a complete list of funds



## ANNUAL GRANT CYCLE

**\$181k+**  
Dollars Awarded

**44**  
Grants

Each year, dollars are awarded to nonprofit organizations and initiatives serving the Greater Itasca Area, thanks in large part to the generosity of our donor-advised funds. These donors help shape grantmaking that meets local needs and make our region stronger for everyone.

► **Our 2025 Annual Grant Cycle is now open through Sep 1**  
Visit [gracf.org/grants](https://gracf.org/grants) for more information and to apply



▶ PRESENTING THE \$10,000 CHECK TO GREAT TAILS ANIMAL RESCUE

# 30 years of community impact.

In 2024, we launched our first annual Seeds of Change campaign. It was our 30th anniversary and we focused on highlighting local nonprofits and the work they do. Twenty-five nonprofits applied and the community voted on their favorite at our Fall event, Harvest Fun(d) Fest.



1994

7 FUNDS

\$250K ASSETS



2024

284 FUNDS

\$31.8M ASSETS

We're grateful to all who have supported this journey—and look forward to the next 30 years of growing generosity together.



▶ FIRST GRACF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE LATE WENDY ROY, AND JOANN BAKKEN

## Seeds of Change HARVEST FUN(D) FEST IMPACT

# \$30K

### IN AWARDS TO LOCAL NONPROFITS

by community vote

- ▶ \$10K TO  GREAT TAILS ANIMAL RESCUE
- ▶ \$3K TO  BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GRAND RAPIDS & GREENWAY
- ▶ \$2K TO  new beginnings  
pregnancy + family support
- ▶ \$15K TO  COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRAND RAPIDS AREA  
for long-term sustainability



Save your spot for our 2025 event!



GRACF.ORG/SEEDS-OF-CHANGE

### Sponsorship Opportunities

- PLATINUM PARTNER \$5,000+
- GOLD LEAF \$3,000-\$4,999
- SILVER LEAF \$1,000-\$2,999
- GREEN LEAF \$500-\$999

## A Legacy of Connection and Giving Back

Dede Emerson's life has been anything but ordinary. From her roots in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, she charted a path that took her across the globe—always embracing new challenges, reinventing herself, and making an impact wherever she went. Today, even as her adventures have spanned continents and careers, her heart remains tied to her hometown, where she continues to give back in meaningful ways.

Dede grew up in Grand Rapids but moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, prior to 9th grade. She launched her first career as a professional jazz musician, performing bebop and immersing herself in the vibrant world of music. She went to New York City to take a class in jazz improvisation. She instantly and enthusiastically embraced the vibrant jazz scene in Manhattan. She met many jazz musicians and people in the business. She became friends with jazz pianists Bud Powell, Dave Brubeck, and many other renowned players. She honed her playing skills and was influenced by visually studying the



▶ DEDE EMERSON

playing styles of various jazz pianists. She was asked by Count Basie and others to perform at Birdland, a famous NYC jazz club. She also became friends with Johnny Mathis during these years.

But music was only the beginning. After earning a master's degree in international affairs, she embarked on a distinguished 30-year career with the United Nations, working in international development and humanitarian relief—a role that took her from the halls of global diplomacy to the front lines of critical world events. She went on over sixty missions for the UN as well as serving in its offices overseas.

Dede went on to write her first book, "A Different Kind of Streetwalker... Manhattan by Foot, One Block at a Time," where she chronicled her post-retirement ambitious quest to walk every block of Manhattan, proving her determination and her enduring curiosity about the world around her. She then went on to write her memoir, "And For My Next Act... From Bebop to the United Nations and Beyond," which captures her

remarkable journey of transformation and lifelong learning.

Despite her far-reaching experiences, Dede has never lost sight of where she came from. Dede still lives in New York, but in 2017, she established a charitable fund with the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation to support projects and initiatives that she cares about and that enrich her hometown. Since its inception, the Dede Emerson Fund has granted an impressive \$159,000 to local organizations, helping to strengthen community life and open doors of opportunity for others.

"We have been fortunate to count Dede among those who feel deeply connected to our community," said Mindy Nuhring, Executive Director of the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation.

“*Her life story is inspiring, and her ongoing commitment to Grand Rapids is a wonderful example of the power of giving back.*”

She has been and continues to be a





► 2024 GREATER ITASCA AREA STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

90+  
Scholarship Funds

256  
Scholarships

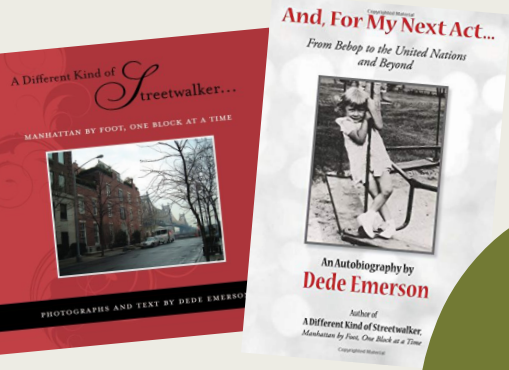
199  
Recipients

\$329k  
Awarded to  
Greater Itasca Area  
students



good friend to Grand Rapids.”

Whether through her books, her international work, or her thoughtful philanthropy, Dede Emerson continues to leave an



indelible mark. She is a testament to the idea that no matter how far you go in life, your roots—and your willingness to nurture them—remain vitally important. The Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation is honored to be part of her story and grateful for the meaningful way she continues to give back.



These funds offer residents and businesses a meaningful way to invest in the places they call home. Each fund is guided by a volunteer advisory committee made up of local citizens who know their community's unique needs and opportunities.

**\$28k**  
Deer River Area  
COMMUNITY FUND

**\$40k**  
Hill City Area  
COMMUNITY FUND

**\$21k**  
Greater Itasca Area  
COMMUNITY FUND

**\$23k**  
Greenway Area  
COMMUNITY FUND

**\$38k**  
Nashwauk Area  
COMMUNITY FUND

**\$11k**  
McGregor Lakes  
AREA FOUNDATION  
*Managed by GRACF*

TOTAL **\$161k**

**\$52.7k** in Cancer Crisis Funding

HELPED  
**42 People**  
THROUGH  
BLANDIN EMPLOYEES  
FOR LIFE FUND

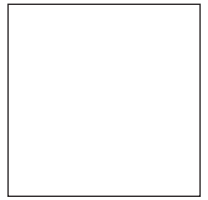
HELPED  
**77 People**  
THROUGH  
ITASCA AREA  
CANCER CRISIS FUND



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

GRAND RAPIDS AREA

350 NW 1st Avenue, Suite E  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744



\$3.8M

TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO GRACF IN 2024

\$2.6M

TOTAL GRANTS &  
SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

\$34M

TOTAL PHILANTHROPIC  
ASSETS

284

CHARITABLE  
FUNDS

**Thank you for partnering with Grand Rapids  
Area Community Foundation** where we believe that  
generosity gives everyone the opportunity to thrive.

(218) 999-9100  
[gracf.org](https://gracf.org)

All financial information contained was extracted from 2024 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 ([guidestar.org](https://www.guidestar.org)).