

Giving Thanks

In this season of Thanksgiving, the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation takes this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to making Oak Park and River Forest a better community in which to live. We know there is real caring and energy and philanthropic action at work in our community. Some individuals have been recognized for their outstanding philanthropic work, some share their resources quietly, and many volunteer a prodigious amount of time and energy addressing the issues and opportunities we find here.



We know this because our mission places us squarely in the midst of the action. The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation's mission is to inspire philanthropy and steward the community towards sustainability and well-being. We've convened community members, listened and acted -- responding with scholarships, grants and gifts from funds we manage.

But we have also responded by developing a strategic plan of action to create a vision for 2014 that provides a *foundation* for the community's own vision. We are developing opportunities that move us from silos to systems that address concerns, from measuring activities to measuring outcomes, from monitoring what happens to resources we share to accountability and real improvement in the lives of all members of our community.

As the starting point of our strategic planning, we invited residents to meet with us so we could hear their aspirations for our community. We assembled a committee of community leaders to study the input, and after evaluating all of these aspirations on a super wish list, our fellow citizens realized that most could be included within two visions: "ensuring the success of all youth" and making Oak Park and River Forest "environmentally sustainable communities."

This year, we have awarded \$100,000 in support of these visions. In addition we have granted \$27,000 to local nonprofit organizations to support the essential work they do in our communities. Thus far this year, from the funds and the scholarships we manage, more than \$1.5 million has been granted by the Foundation.

Recently, we invited residents to a Community Cafe event to help guide us in our efforts to help our youth succeed - from pre-kindergarten through high school. More than 100 students, parents, teachers, grandparents and public officials came together and shared what they thought contributed to the success of all youth. As with our strategic plan, we're now going through a process with the Community Café input to identify those visions and actions that will be the focus of our efforts in the immediate future.

Partnering with the Environmental Club at Oak Park & River Forest High School, we are delivering reusable water bottles to students in exchange for disposable ones. We've highlighted the work of District 90's Green Team to educate parents and students about sustainability in daily life. We are also commissioning a baseline report that will form the basis of an environmental sustainability plan for both villages to be used to determine progress towards long term environmental sustainability.

We are engaged with Dominican University through a pilot program of Community Leadership development. This program will provide local emerging leaders the opportunity to enhance their leadership skills and apply them within the context of the Oak Park and River Forest communities.

As a financial resource for our community, the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation attracts and manages a variety of funds which help us realize our community's aspirations. Right now, every dollar contributed to the Community Foundation's *Communityworks* Endowment will be matched 1:1 up to a total of \$2,000,000 dollars. This specific endowment is to support the work of ensuring the success of all youth and the environmental sustainability of Oak Park and River Forest.

So if you donate to this fund, share your resources quietly and/or participate in the philanthropic energy of our community by giving of your time and energy, the Board and Staff of the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation give you our heartfelt thanks.



Boyd McDowell III,
Board President
Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation



Sophia Lloyd,
Executive Director
Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation

A version of this letter to the editor appeared in the ***Wednesday Journal*** of November 24, 2009