



You have probably heard the phrase “Think globally, act locally.” This simple adage reminds us that in order to enact change in the world, we have to start with ourselves and our immediate surroundings. Only then can we push ourselves further and effect change on a grander scale.

As the community foundation serving Oak Park, River Forest and the surrounding region of west Cook County, we are constantly working to improve and enrich the lives of our residents and neighbors in need. Our representation and advocacy does not end with local borders. In order to benefit our area to the fullest extent possible, the Foundation is active not just here but at the state and national levels as well.

Earlier this year, I attended Foundations on the Hill, an annual event in Washington, D.C. where grantmakers and philanthropy-serving organizations meet with Illinois legislators. The event was an opportunity to get a better understanding of what federal funding may be available in the future, and to educate our elected delegates on the importance of philanthropy and the impact it has on their districts and constituencies. The relationships we are building allow us to better anticipate both long-term and immediate needs that might occur.

For example, migrant families being shipped to Chicago from Texas and Florida need our support, yet resources are limited, straining not only the government agencies receiving them but also the nonprofit advocacy groups working to find housing, jobs and child care for this vulnerable population. Community foundations can work in tandem to provide financial support as well as to stress to legislators the importance of federal dollars to aid these efforts.

At the state level, we have joined with Forefront and the Alliance of Illinois Community Foundations in supporting the Illinois GIVES Act, which establishes a 25% state income tax credit for charitable gifts to endowment funds at qualified community foundations. This credit will be available to all taxpayers at all income levels and will help keep philanthropic dollars here in Illinois, where they can benefit our communities. You can learn more at [ilgives.org](http://ilgives.org).

Locally, we are working hard to build trust and deepen relationships with neighboring communities through the continuation of our *Community Voices* report, and strengthen our existing partnerships within Oak Park and River Forest. Some of this work is described in the articles inside, and we will share more exciting news in the months to come.

I invite you to come along on this journey as we reshape the future of philanthropy in our region and fight for an equitable society where everyone, regardless of the circumstance of birth or upbringing, is treated justly and fairly. If each of us acts locally, together we have the power to change the world.

In leadership and partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony".

## Advocating On Another Level

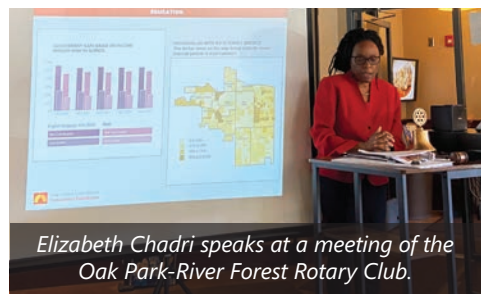
**"In order to benefit our area to the fullest extent possible, the Foundation is active not just here but at the state and national levels as well."**

– Tony Martinez, Jr., *President and CEO*





# Community Voices Continue to be Heard



Elizabeth Chadri speaks at a meeting of the Oak Park-River Forest Rotary Club.

Last summer the Community Foundation published its *Community Voices* report, which shares the results of its recent community needs assessment for the west Cook County region and reveals the most pressing needs in our area, what the data tells us, and how the power of our community will guide our future to a racially just society. In the year since, we have hosted public forums and shared the report's findings with local and regional governments, charitable organizations and other stakeholders. More than 150 people from Oak Park, River Forest and surrounding communities attended in-person and virtual events. The report may be downloaded from our website at [oprpcf.org/community-voices](http://oprpcf.org/community-voices).

Most recently, the Foundation has met with community leaders to present the report as a framework for future efforts toward racial equity. In March, we met with members of the Proviso Township Ministerial Alliance Network (PTMAN) at its monthly breakfast at the Howard Mohr Community Center in Forest Park, at the invitation of Forest Park Mayor Rory Hoskins.

In April, we presented the report at an Oak Park-River Forest Rotary Club luncheon at Cucina Paradiso, as well as at a meeting of the Kiwanis Club of River Forest-Oak Park at the River Forest Public Library.

"We appreciate the opportunity to build trusting relationships with leaders who are doing such important and meaningful work in the community," said Program Director Elizabeth Chadri. "We believe the *Community Voices* report is of great value not just to the Foundation and the nonprofit sector, but for local governments, schools and the community at large."

The Community Foundation is looking inward as well. We have been actively reviewing our investment strategy, hiring practices and grant processes to make them more equitable. In the near future, the Foundation will be shifting its grantmaking process to a participatory model — establishing an oversight committee made up of members of our board of directors, as well as residents who were involved in the *Community Voices* focus groups, to evaluate and develop new systems.

"We brought these voices together to ensure that they were heard, and we are now making good on our promise to become a more inclusive institution," Chadri said. "This evolution will allow community members to be more directly involved in determining which projects receive funding and where our efforts should be directed."

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## GIVING GROUPS UPDATE

In a move to fully democratize giving group members' voices, ranked choice voting has been implemented in the Women Leaders in Philanthropy (WLIP) and NextGen Leaders in Philanthropy (NextGen) giving groups this year. This system considers not only the decision maker's first-choice preferences but also their subsequent choices. It helps ensure that the grant applications or causes with the broadest support receive funding.

WLIP began with the Foundation's *Community Voices* report to understand the community's needs and priorities. Then, via the new voting system, WLIP members selected mental health, gun violence prevention, and early childhood education as their top 2023 cause areas to support. Additionally, members voted to initiate its first ever "seed grant" opportunity for organizations addressing food insecurity or food deserts. In total, WLIP will distribute over \$60,000 in grants in 2023.

NextGen will be granting \$5,000 in 2023 to fund capacity building efforts in the community. Both WLIP and NextGen will be announcing their grant awards later this month.

A different but equally effective consensus building process was used by the Future Philanthropists Program to make their grant-making decisions. After painstakingly reviewing 35 proposals, the high school juniors awarded \$50,000 to 11 deserving organizations, funding a variety of programs and projects serving those in need. At the completion of their nine month fundraising campaign that culminated in the "An Evening Under Parisian Stars" event in May, the seniors raised over \$95,000 for the FPP Endowment Fund.

## LEADERSHIP LAB: APPLY TODAY!

The Community Foundation's 10-month leadership program, Leadership Lab, is now accepting applications. Emerging leaders interested in personal and professional coaching, skills development, and a curriculum based around understanding the most urgent needs of the diverse West Cook community should apply by visiting [oprpcf.org/leadership-lab](http://oprpcf.org/leadership-lab) or by contacting Leadership Lab program coordinator Jenny Yang at [leadershiplab@oprpcf.org](mailto:leadershiplab@oprpcf.org) for more information.

# HEPH Foundation Helps Students Soar with STEAM

The HEPH Foundation is changing the way students see their future selves. Instead of a world divided into traditional careers limited by the love or hate of math, HEPH envisions a world where students of varied interests can find science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) successfully intertwined in school and in the workforce.

Founded by Steve and Sheila Conner in 2014, HEPH uses mindfulness, teamwork, creativity, real-world problem solving and entrepreneurship to create an active learning experience, chosen and designed by the students themselves.

"Our guides focus on listening as they work alongside the students to help them make discoveries and overcome adversity along the way," says Sheila Conner. "Our program makes space for failure and we value it as part of the learning and creative process."

This fall the HEPH Foundation will be using all the knowledge they've acquired to expand their offerings in up to 10 schools, with each program customized to the needs of that community. They'll also offer an online program that engages younger learners in a curriculum where they work



HEPH Foundation co-founders, Steve and Sheila Conner

alongside their parents or caregiver with hands-on activities.

"Through our team- and project-based learning approach, every individual plays a unique and important role and our program allows learners to try on different hats throughout the process," Steve Conner says. "One day they're working on building a circuit and the next they are using a remote control to steer their creation. Our program gives learners the opportunity to choose the learning path that is best for them."

To learn more about the HEPH Foundation, visit [hephfoundation.org](http://hephfoundation.org).

## INVESTMENT ADVICE



Jeff Schroeder

## Parting Charitable Advice from Jeff Schroeder

The Community Foundation congratulates Jeff Schroeder, CPA and partner at the accounting firm Sassetti LLC, on his upcoming retirement later this year. Schroeder has worked with the Foundation for over a decade, both as an auditor and later as a valued advisor to donors, nonprofit partners and the Foundation itself.

His lifelong practice of philanthropy began when he was young.

"I grew up in a Presbyterian church in the south suburbs, and my parents were both involved in the leadership," he says. "Giving to the church was always something we did." They also supported school programs and donated their time to many organizations.

He estimates that he and his wife Linda donate to over 50 charities each year. But beyond financial support, Schroeder has generously given of his time and talent: he has served as treasurer or a board member for countless organizations since moving to Oak Park in the late 1980s — often with organizations that relate to aspects of his family or music.

Today, Schroeder serves on the boards of the Albert Zari Educational Foundation and La Caccina, a choral organization, and is a member of the finance committees of the OPRF Chamber of Commerce and his church.

As a tax professional, Schroeder recognizes that charitable giving can create a win-win scenario by saving clients on their taxes while helping organizations that need support. He notes that in the current tax structure with the higher standard deduction, it may be advantageous to make a more significant gift in a particular year

rather than donating smaller amounts annually. "I'm not saying to stop giving to whoever you give to, but one should consider strategic tax goals when planning your larger donations," he adds. Donations of appreciated stock and donating required minimum distributions from retirement accounts are also great ways to effectively use current tax laws to maximize giving and minimize taxes.

"The Community Foundation, to me, has two real purposes for donors. One is to provide an alternative to setting up your own private foundation," he says. A private foundation requires significant costs in staffing as well as legal and accounting fees, in addition to the time and expenses related to management of investments and donations. "By creating a donor advised fund with the Community Foundation, you get the same tax benefits as a private foundation, and you can specify how the earnings can be used. For example, you could designate that the earnings on your gift go to support college scholarships for kids at OPRF," Schroeder continues.

"Secondly, many donors like to use the Community Foundation for some of their own annual giving. They rely on the Community Foundation to put their donations to the best use, whether in programs to support local organizations, or in training for young philanthropists."

If you are looking to create a legacy, making a donation to the Community Foundation is a win-win-win, he says. "First, it is good for your fellow man. Second, it's good for you from a near-term tax standpoint, and it can be helpful from an estate tax standpoint should you need to get your holdings below the current \$12.92 million estate tax threshold. So instead of that money going to the IRS, it's now going to be put to work in your community."



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# Community Connections



## 2023 Enrichment Grant Winners

We are grateful to our Foundation family of donors for their support of educational enrichment grants. This year 19 young people were recipients of grants totaling \$43,250, enabling them to travel abroad, attend camp, learn a musical instrument and more.

To learn more about student enrichment grants or to set one up, please visit the Grants & Scholarships section of [oprfcf.org](http://oprfcf.org) or contact Philanthropic Advisor Carrie Summy at [csummy@oprfcf.org](mailto:csummy@oprfcf.org) or 708-848-1560.

