Women’s Endowment Fund celebrates 25 years

“You know what we need? A women’s foundation.”

An idea sparked in the early 1990s by six women ignited a 25-year legacy of uplifting local women and girls. Through the years, founding mothers Jody Bacon, Marie Covington, Carrie Herman, Norma Rist, Ilene Shapiro, and Laurie Zuckerman have seen the Women’s Endowment Fund transform into a crucial community resource.

“We had a list of things that needed to be done for women in the community – a really, really long list,” said Norma Rist, founding mother of the Women’s Endowment Fund. “We need a foundation.”

So, to harness the power of endowment, the founding mothers turned to Akron Community Foundation in 1993 with an establishing gift of $106,000, which they had raised by asking local women to give $1,000 each.

“It wasn’t enough to have a good idea, we had to have money behind it,” said Laurie Zuckerman, founding mother of the Women’s Endowment Fund. “And how could we get all these needs filled without the money behind it?”

In 2012, the Women’s Endowment Fund spearheaded an aggressive “For Women, Forever” campaign. Named after the fund’s signature annual event, the campaign began with a goal of raising $2.013 million for the health, safety and economic well-being of women and girls in Summit County. One year after the “For Women, Forever” campaign launched, the Women’s Endowment Fund achieved its goal.

Since then, the Women’s Endowment Fund has grown to $3.5 million and awarded $1.1 million in grants to support its founding mission.

“It’s like we blinked and it’s 25 years later,” said Carrie Herman, founding mother of the Women’s Endowment Fund. “We’ve come so far from the $106,000 that we first raised.”

To help define its grantmaking priorities, the Women’s Endowment Fund also offers its resources to fund important studies on women and girls, and its biennial forums help uncover critical issues in the community.

“Without the Women’s Endowment Fund, I could not do what it is we do,” said Dr. Angela Neal-Barnett, founder of Sisters United Now (S.U.N.). “Very early on, they saw the value and importance of our project, and it is through their funding that our project has evolved to the stage it is now.”

In 2018, the Women’s Endowment Fund awarded grants totaling $183,000 to 23 Greater Akron nonprofit organizations. Of this $183,000, impact grants totaling $50,000 were awarded to programs that help reduce Summit County’s infant mortality rate by addressing key issues identified during the fund’s 2017 Forum on Women and Girls.

“Our vision is to be the lead advocate for women and girls in the community,” said Kendra Williams, vice president of the Women’s Endowment Fund. “The fund is also a way for women and girls to tell their stories – when we think about who we’re supporting, we want to know those stories.”

The Women’s Endowment Fund aims to grow to $3.9 million by 2025 through its “For Women, Forever” event and other initiatives such as the “Who Is Your SHEro?” campaign, which raised $50,000 in 2017. This year’s “Who Is Your SHEro?” campaign will run until April 30 and aims to surpass its 2017 efforts with 36 dedicated fundraising ambassadors.

“I see the future, and what we are creating and enabling is really something positive,” said Ilene Shapiro, founding mother of the Women’s Endowment Fund. “This fund is essential to women and girls now and for years to come.”

Watch the video series featuring WEF’s past, present and future on our Facebook page: facebook.com/womensendowment
The Women’s Endowment Fund is celebrating 25 years of uplifting women and girls in Summit County.

Our permanent endowment means dollars raised in 2018 will provide funding for important programs that benefit the well-being of women and girls in our community forever! We do this by raising money and making grants to agencies who demonstrate three criteria: an understanding of the issues facing women and girls, the capability to make an impact, and a vision for the future.

We can only do this because of donors like all of you. Donors who have a heart for change and recognize that when women and girls are provided with equal opportunities, our community truly reaches its full potential.

I’m pleased to report that the Women’s Endowment Fund is going strong. A fund that started with six women asking 100 of their closest friends to donate $1,000 each has now grown to $3.5 million. We have awarded over $1.1 million in grants, and in 2018, we provided 23 nonprofit organizations with a record-breaking $183,000. This includes $133,000 to programs that encourage economic empowerment, safety from violence, and health & wellness for women and girls in our community. In addition, we granted $50,000 for infant mortality programs that we hope will move the needle on this important initiative.

As part of our strategic plan, our advisory board aims to raise a minimum of $150,000 each year to grow the fund to $3.9 million by 2025. Right now, you can help us grow and support women and girls in Summit County by honoring your personal SHEro and donating to our annual “Who Is Your SHEro?” campaign this Mother’s Day season.

At the time of this letter, we were nearly halfway to our goal of $50,000. Please help us reach this goal by donating before April 30. When you do so, your SHEro will receive a card acknowledging that a donation has been made in their honor, but not the amount.

For more information, visit www.YourShero.org.

Thank you for helping us change the landscape in Summit County. Let’s all remember that empowered, financially strong, healthy women provide support, nurturing, and leadership in their families – which makes our community a better place to live and thrive for all of us.

Sherry Neubert, president
Women’s Endowment Fund

THANK YOU!

The Women’s Endowment Fund thanks the more than 600 local leaders who joined us for our “For Women, Forever” Annual Dinner on March 6. We could not achieve our goals without your support!
Grants reach $1 million milestone

The Women’s Endowment Fund is celebrating $1 million in grants to programs that uplift and empower women and girls throughout Greater Akron.

In March, the fund awarded $183,000 to 23 nonprofit organizations, bringing its cumulative grantmaking total to more than $1.1 million. This latest round of grants represents the largest amount awarded in a single year in the Women’s Endowment Fund’s 25-year history.

Four impact grants totaling $50,000 were awarded to programs that help reduce Summit County’s infant mortality rate by addressing key issues identified during the fund’s 2017 Forum on Women and Girls.

Other grants this year will support mental health programs for homeless youth, job skills training for women recovering from addiction and more. View the complete list of grants WEF awarded this year at www.akroncf.org/WEFgrants.

Q&A with SHERo Wendy Bolas

Women’s Endowment Fund members sat down with SHERo Wendy Bolas, successful business consultant and former senior vice president of FirstMerit Bank, to learn more about what it means to be a SHERo.

WEF: You were recently named Leadership Akron’s interim president. What excites you most about the role?

WB: Being able to work with such a fine team of folks who deliver programs that benefit our entire community. They are an amazing group of people, and I am honored to join their team, even for a short time.

WEF: What are the most important traits of successful leaders today?

WB: Leaders today must be able to collaborate with diverse groups of constituents, communicate effectively through many channels, and build strong relationships.

WEF: What will be the biggest challenge for the generation of women behind you?

WB: There will be many challenges as change continues to come at such a rapid pace. I do believe that communicating in a world where people are interacting more frequently through technology will be a huge hurdle, especially as younger generations enter the workforce.

WEF: Who is your SHERo and why?

WB: There are so many incredible women in this community; it is virtually impossible to pick only one. I do have one woman who taught me a great deal as I was working my way through leadership roles at FirstMerit Bank.

Barbara Mathews was a strong mentor who taught me invaluable lessons. She had an amazing ability to bring folks together for a common cause, get them to work hard, and have a little fun along the way. I continually strive to follow in her footsteps.

Read more SHERo stories on social media

Learn more about our SHERoes on Facebook and Twitter during our “Who Is Your SHERo?” campaign through April 30. Share our posts and tag your own SHERo on Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag #AkronSHERo.

Facebook: @WomensEndowment
Twitter: @AkronCFwef

Memorial & Tribute Gifts


Memorial gifts for:

Theresa Petures by
Cindy Johnson
Judith A. Read by
Read Family Fund of Akron Community Foundation
Libby Rosenblatt by
Deborah Yabs
Elaine Woloshyn by
Drs. Mark & Sandy Auburn
Ilene Shapiro
Karen Tailbott

Tribute gifts for:

Laura B. Culp by
Ilene Shapiro
Elizabeth Dalton by
Amy Dalton
Mark Dalton
Pat Divoky by
Karen Tailbott
Bonnie Estep by
Dr. Ernest Estep
Judi Hill by
Laura Hnat
Judge Carla Moore by
Bryan & Susan Kinnaman
Dianne Newman by
Eloise & Boyd Mackus
Laurie Zuckerman by

Susan Allen, Ph.D.
Wendy Bolas
Judge Jane Bond, retired
Frances Seiberling Buchalter
Gina Burt
Halle Jones Capers
Iris Caston
Donna Caja
Katie Clarke
Casey Breck Colon
Marie Covington
Robert & Laura Culp
Jane Lehr Eckert, Ph.D.
Lorraine Fair
Katie Fry and Sue Lacy
Nick & Ruthie George
Tommy Gersman
Sheri Glauberman
Susan & Jon Golden
Louise Kuhns Harvey
Sherry Hellman
Carrie Herman

MEMORIAL & TRIBUTE GIFTS

Make a donation anytime at www.akroncf.org/give/WEF.
The Women’s Endowment Fund is an affiliate of Akron Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity.

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If you find any errors on the address label above, please call 330-376-8522 or send an email to dherman@akroncf.org.

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**For Women, Forever**
See more photos from the event on WEF’s Facebook page @WomensEndowment

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On March 6, over 600 local leaders gathered at Goodyear Hall in Akron to celebrate women’s philanthropy at WEF’s annual dinner. The sold-out event featured Laura Thompson, executive vice president & CFO of The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, and raised approximately $100,000 for the endowment.

**Top left:** WEF President Sherry Neubert and event emcee Sara Shookman present Laura Thompson with a plaque made by Leandra Drumm. **Top right:** Event committee members Sylvia Trundle, Laura DiCola, Kimberly Young, Diana Selzer, Lashawrda Fellows, Kendra Williams and Pam Valentine **Bottom left:** Co-chairs Kendra Williams and Pam Valentine **Bottom right:** “For Women, Forever” guests

Photos by Shane Wynn