



MY COMMUNITY MATTERS

Diana Heggen

Retreat or move forward?

A former Trustee was fond of teasing me about having the Board meet in “retreat” once a year. “Why do we call it a retreat?” he would ask. “Why don’t we call it an advance? We are meeting to determine the future, not to hide.” Why indeed? Analogies to war games aside, I find that the word retreat to a Board may mean many things, such as:

- “Do we have to go through another SWOT analysis?”
- “Another consensus building, team building, goal setting, strategy development session? Where is this really going to go?”
- “Too touchy-feely for me, thanks.”

The aforementioned Trustee would have loved our June 1 Board retreat, purposely designed to draw upon our Trustees’ vast knowledge and strategic sense, not to rehash our goals and objectives.

Now don’t get me wrong. We did affirm our strategic direction. However, we did it with our feet on the ground, data to back up the goals and invigorating discussions that led to a good direction for the next few years.

The Trustees and senior staff did not want to adjourn the meeting, thanks in part to excellent facilitation by Bob Tobin, principal of the Williams Group.

Ronna Alexander graphically captured our thoughts throughout the day. Her skillful real-time drawings kept the Board energized throughout the day. The graphic recordings have already been used much more than typed meeting minutes ever are.

During our time together, we discussed the critical issues facing this dynamic community foundation and outlined our key goals:

- Lead significant social change.
- Grow current and future philanthropic resources.
- Engage donors to take action to make a difference.
- Deliver organizational excellence.

As the Board and staff took time to identify some community assets, metro Grand Rapids’ distinctive nature came through loud and clear:

- The leadership is positive.
- Public/private partnerships and collaboration are the cornerstone.
- People care. They are compassionate.

When we discussed what the future may hold for this community, we determined that Grand Rapids Community Foundation needs to serve as a stronger voice of diversity and inclusion. And we all need to act like one community. Embracing our goal of collective impact will mean working in alignment with many other businesses, organizations, people and networks.

The Board resonated with a transformational strategy that the leadership staff strongly recommended. The notion of transformation may seem a bit out there, but, frankly, no other word would aptly describe it.

We are looking to the next decade for bold action as we move from our 90th anniversary to our centennial! The Board and staff declared that we will be bold, and we will break out of our comfort zones for the betterment of our community. Look for more stories about the Grand Rapids Community Foundation’s impact. You will see more about us in the community. We are on the move! ■



To read more of Diana’s writing about philanthropy and social change issues her blog features regular postings. It can be accessed at grfoundation.org/blog. Your comments on her postings are welcome and encouraged.