



# MY COMMUNITY MATTERS

*Diana Heig*

## Impact, Grants and the Future

**T**he Philanthropy Roundtable, a national organization, recently asked key philanthropic leaders from around the country two questions: “What is the single most daring, audacious and successful grant of the past 100 years?” and “What grant will people be talking about 100 years from now?” Responses from these leaders in the foundation world were quite intriguing, and you can read their collective wisdom at [www.philanthropyroundtable.org](http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org).

I brought this idea to our staff in a recent email: “What would you say has been our most daring, audacious grant since 1922? What could be a great grant we would make or a community change for which we could be the spark for the needed change in the future—not necessarily 100 years out but maybe in the next five to 10 years?”

### Here are some of our staff's great responses:

*“I have always felt that the initial planning grant we gave to what is now called the Coalition to End Homelessness is our most successful grant. I believe it was for \$50,000 in 2004. That grant laid the groundwork for a community-centered collaborative that is revolutionizing a new approach to housing for all members of our community.... Suffice it to say, in my opinion, not only did it lead to a significant shift in how a system is approaching an important community issue, but it also helped define the values of this Foundation. The results of that grant are informing nearly everything we do in the program department—our goals, priorities and strategies.... I think Kent County as a whole is better suited to do the same!”*

*“When I think of ‘long-lasting’ impact, I think of our program Encore—putting experienced adults to work to better our*

*community and enrich their lives. This is such an important endeavor as all the baby boomers start reaching retirement plus. This grant will impact our community for years and years.”*

*“Our initial \$5,000 grant to Grand Valley State University back in 1959 to start a ‘committee for a four-year college’ and our 1960-61 grant totaling \$200,000 for startup and land purchase, which influenced the location of the then college. Add to those the grants we approved for buying land and building buildings in downtown Grand Rapids. (We gave \$300,000 in 1985 for a ‘downtown center,’ \$300,000 in 1994 for land acquisition and \$500,000 in 1996 for the business school.) What a huge difference having a strong downtown GVSU campus has made.”*

We have made many more grants to GVSU as well as to other higher education institutions in the area.

I would also say the Community Foundation was on the forefront of change and trends when, in 1988, we funded one of the first AIDS programs in the country. This community was the only one to create an AIDS foundation in the state of Michigan!

Some of our community leadership work is remarkable, yet hard to describe in vibrant ways. We have consistently provided financial support and leadership for preventing child abuse and neglect. Since 1996 we have annually funded programs that provide needed services to families at risk of abuse and neglect. Sixteen years later, these efforts have been wrapped into a large collaborative effort known as the Kent School Services Network. Several years ago, Kent County appropriated close to \$2 million a year for proven prevention efforts.



### Will that ever make headlines?

Not likely, but many families are likely made more whole and healthy because of our cooperation with others in the community.

My vision five to 10 years from now is that our efforts will result in:

- a community celebrated for its high rate of high school graduates
- a community that is seen across the country as one that embraces diversity and inclusion
- a community that has successfully bolstered its neighborhoods to be safe, desirable, affordable and attractive
- a community that keeps growing its economic vibrancy to create and retain jobs and attract talent from around the globe to live, work and play
- a community where governmental entities have continuously improved our infrastructure and provide a safe environment for all citizens

Of course I have a list a mile long. Check out my blog periodically at [www.grfoundation.org/presidentspage](http://www.grfoundation.org/presidentspage) to note my additions. As we continue to identify great grants, I'll share them as well as any ideas for the future. We would love to have your feedback too! ■