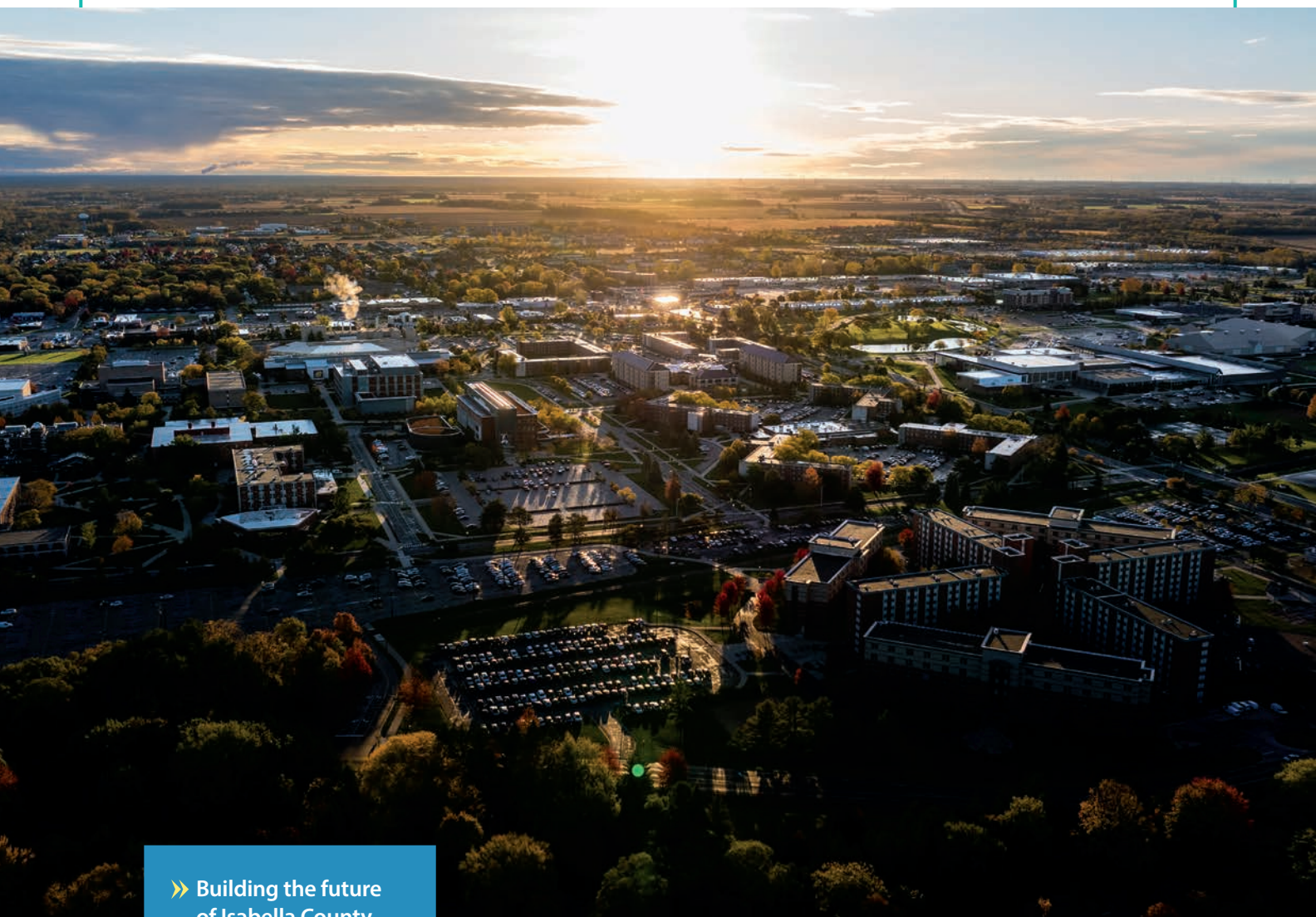
2025 **ANNUAL REPORT**

THE LEGACY



» **Building the future of Isabella County together, forever.**

Mt. Pleasant Area
community foundation℠
For **good.** For **ever.**℠



MPACF STAFF



TERA ALBRECHT
Donor Services Officer
talbrecht@mpacf.org



JAIMIE CAPEN-CASCADDAN
Program Officer
jcapen@mpacf.org



SARAH LOWNSBERY
Administrative Officer
slownsbery@mpacf.org

A message from the CEO

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

During my first full year in this role, I have been honored to contribute to the legacy established 35 years ago by visionary leaders committed to improving life in Isabella County. Our organization has built endowment funds enabling us to grant nearly $15 million back into our community. Helping donors support meaningful causes, building lasting endowments, and knowing that they will benefit our community forever is truly rewarding.

Last fall, our Board of Trustees approved a new strategic plan, marking a significant milestone for our organization. While we remain committed to the core strengths of community foundations, we are also embracing our expanded role as a community leader and partner in developing solutions to some of our community's biggest challenges.

That future is guided by three clear priorities of bringing people together to build relationships and create space for collaboration around the issues that matter most, stewarding resources with care and flexibility to support scholarships, grants, and initiatives that make a real difference today while investing in tomorrow, and creating a strong, unified organization with clear roles, confident decision-making, and a visible presence that inspires trust and invites others to join this work.

None of this happens without you. Every gift, every fund, every conversation about the Community Foundation with your friends and neighbors, and every volunteer hour spent is so important in shaping the future of Isabella County.

As you turn the pages of this 2025 Legacy Magazine, notice the impact your involvement creates and imagine the even greater difference you can make. Make a gift, share the message, or consider starting your own fund today and leave a lasting legacy.

- Liz Conway
CEO/COO
lconway@mpacf.org



At a Glance

A year of growth, generosity, and community impact.

112
NONPROFITS SUPPORTED

$1.4M
GRANTED

120
SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

35
YEARS SERVING ISABELLA COUNTY

302
GRANTS AWARDED

$36M
IN ASSETS

NEARLY
1,000
DONORS MAKING LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS

2026
Board of Trustees



Emma Powell
President



Dan Gaken
Vice President



Bart Blystone
Treasurer



Joe Fleming
Secretary



Paul Alexander



Linda Coyne



Angie Evans



Karmen Fox



Eileen Jennings



Al Johns



Erin Ludwig



Scott Mertes



Tina Powell



Steve Pung



Tony Rau



Erika Ross



Matthew Showalter



Mark Smith



Marilyn Sweeney



Brad Wahr



Peggy Wheeler



Terrie Zitzelsberger

9+ years

EMERITUS TRUSTEES

Emeritus trustees have served at least three full terms or nine consecutive years.

Jill Bourland
Mary Ann Breuer
Bill Chilman
Shirley Martin Decker*
Doug Dodge
George Dunn
James Fabiano
Cheryl Gaudard
Joanne Golden-Trudell
Jim Goodrich
Dyke Heinze
Chuck Hubscher
Eric Janes
Bob Janson
L.A. Johns*
Albert Kaufmann
Dave Keilitz
Bob Long
Steven Martineau
Dianne Morey
Linda Morey
Lon Morey
Sue Murray
Mary Ann O'Neil
Marcie Otteman
Ray Pike
Laura Richards
Nancy Ridley
Bill Rush
Don Schuster
Sid Smith
Michelle Sponseller
Janet Maar Strickler
Tom Sullivan
Judi Sullivan
Bob Wheeler
Terrie Zitzelsberger
*deceased

Strategic Plan Overview

Our strategic plan builds on a strong foundation of community trust and philanthropic impact, offering a roadmap for how the Community Foundation will lead in addressing critical issues, leveraging local strengths, and ensuring that Isabella County remains a place where all residents can thrive.

Convening for Impact

The Community Foundation serves as a trusted place where collaboration begins, bringing together leaders, organizations, and residents to align around shared priorities and create collective solutions.

Funding and Grantmaking: Philanthropy in Action

The Community Foundation stewards resources with excellence and flexibility, supporting transformational scholarships, responsive grantmaking, and a growing culture of philanthropy that invests in Isabella County's future.

Organizational Infrastructure: Strength from Within

The Community Foundation is a strong, unified organization with clear roles, confident decision-making, and a visible presence that inspires trust and action across the community.



Early Care and Education



Basic Needs and Economic Development



Health and Wellbeing



Community Engagement

Four focus key areas that shape quality of life in our community:

- Early Care and Education
- Basic Needs and Economic Development
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Engagement

These focus areas help guide how the Community Foundation listens, learns, and invests in the community. The following pages highlight how this work is already taking shape across Isabella County.



Tour of MMI Facility at the Childcare Professionals Appreciation Summit

Early Care and Education

A thriving community begins with access to opportunity, to care, and to education. In Isabella County, ensuring every child and young adult has the support they need to grow, learn, and succeed is both a moral responsibility and an economic necessity. From early care through post-secondary success, the Foundation is committed to strengthening the full continuum of education, helping families find stability and preparing the next generation for a strong future.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Honoring Childcare Providers at the Childcare Professionals Appreciation Summit

In September, the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation's Community Leadership Committee hosted a Childcare Professionals Appreciation Summit at Mid-Michigan Industries. More than 30 childcare providers from Isabella County attended the celebration.

Speakers included representatives from the Community Foundation, who shared grant opportunities for nonprofit partners; the Small Business Development Corporation, who provided business resources; Great Lakes Bay Michigan Works!, who discussed the apprenticeship program; and the Middle Michigan Development Corporation, who highlighted advocacy efforts and updates from the East Central Childcare Coalition.

The Community Foundation's Community Leadership Committee is working to address the childcare shortage in our area. A childcare desert means that there is only one childcare opening for every three children who need a spot. Isabella County's infant care is more problematic, with just one infant spot for every six infants.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

From Treatment to Transformation

At the end of my freshman year I was diagnosed with Ewing Sarcoma, a form of bone and soft tissue cancer. I went from trying to navigate high school to one navigating a world of hospital rooms, treatment schedules, and words no teenager should have to learn. Cancer reshaped everything. Fourteen cycles of chemotherapy and thirty-one days of proton radiation therapy became my new curriculum. While my classmates moved forward in semesters, I measured progress in small victories: a completed treatment, a stable scan, a day with enough strength to feel like myself again.

During my time going through it all, I made a quiet promise to myself: if I got through this, I would not let the opportunity be wasted. I would return, rebuild, and reclaim the path that had been interrupted. When treatment ended, the world didn't automatically fall back into place. I had ground to make up, and it was not easy. Catching up meant long hours, summer classes, and pushing myself when it would have been easier to slow down. But I had already faced something far more difficult. Step by step, I finished my high school goal and graduated in 2024 with the class I had started with. That milestone carried more weight than any diploma alone could represent. It was proof of resilience, of commitment, of a promise kept.



During my final year, I took dual enrollment courses, challenging myself further and preparing for what came next. That next step led me to Mid Michigan College, where I completed the Michigan Transfer Agreement program, and then onward to Central Michigan University. Each transition marked not just academic progress, but a continuation of the life I fought to keep. Today, my focus is on the arts—specifically visual and cinematic arts, and set design. Creativity became a form of healing for me, a way to process, to imagine, and to build something meaningful from experience. I want to create environments and stories that immerse others, that make them feel something real.



I have not done this alone. The support I've received from scholarships, the Mt. Pleasant Community Foundation, and Isabella Bank has given me the ability to focus on my studies and continue pursuing my goals. That support is more than financial; it is a reminder that people believe in my future. Surviving cancer gave me a second chance at life. But it also gave me clarity. I understand now how fragile time can be, and how powerful determination is when paired with purpose. My path was not the one I expected when I first entered high school. It was harder, longer, and at times uncertain. But it led me here... stronger, focused, and ready to build something meaningful out of everything I've been through.

This is not just a story about overcoming illness. It is a story about continuing forward, about honoring a second chance, and about creating a future with intention.

—

Eliy Ava Lynne
Founder and Pediatric Cancer Survivor
Miss Michigan Teen USA 2025

Basic Needs and Economic Development

Meeting basic needs is essential, but lasting change requires more than short-term support. In Isabella County, challenges like food insecurity, housing, transportation, and financial stability continue to impact families. The Foundation supports efforts that not only respond to immediate needs, but also work to break the cycles that create them, strengthening both individual stability and the broader local economy.



BASIC NEEDS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Food Insecurities

In fall 2025, significant changes to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), a USDA initiative supporting low-income families, heightened concerns about food security in Isabella County, where over 8,500 residents qualified for assistance. With support from the Community Impact Fund (Community Impact Fund), the Mt. Pleasant Oil Industry Food Pantry Fund (Field of Interest Fund), and the Dow Chemical Company (Pass-through Fund), we awarded more than $47,000 to organizations working to address food insecurity.

BASIC NEEDS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Christmas Outreach of Isabella County

Christmas Outreach of Isabella County exists to ensure every neighbor can experience a meaningful holiday, regardless of income.

The program saw a 40% increase in participants in 2025 - the largest jump in registrations since Christmas Outreach began in 1980. In November, 760 households registered, listing the ages and genders of each family member. With demand rising sharply, organizers moved quickly to secure enough supplies to serve 2,547 individuals.





To help meet winter needs the Paula Arndt Women's Fund (Donor Advised Fund) donated $5,500 toward gloves and mittens for women and girls. Among this year's registrants were 860 women and 519 girls Christmas Outreach also received $1,303 from the Community Impact Fund, $1,033 from the Steve and Sue Pung Family Fund (Community Impact Fund), $664 from the Andy Wheeler Community Needs Fund (Community Impact Fund), $500 from the Shepherd Community Fund Honoring Robert H. Bates (Field of Interest Fund) for helping those in need with essential household items.

Organizers expect registrations to remain high in 2026, potentially increasing again. Donations and volunteers are welcomed year-round.

> "It made sense to create a fund and be able to give back to those less fortunate who reside within the community and Isabella County."
>
> - **Paula Arndt,** *Fund Founder of the Paula Arndt Women's Fund*

All of us can be *philanthropists*

Every gift matters, no matter its size. The Community Impact Fund of the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation addresses ever-evolving local needs, from the most pressing issues to emerging opportunities.

Every donation you make to the Community Impact Fund is preserved forever, combined with other donations and invested. The interest earned is used to support Isabella County communities and residents in ways that have the greatest impact for the times.

Please, make a donation today. Your gift will change lives *Forever.*



McLaren Central Michigan staff with a critical-care ventilator

Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are foundational to a thriving community. Physical and mental health shape how individuals learn, work, and care for others. When barriers to care exist, the ability to thrive in all areas of life is limited. The Foundation supports efforts that expand access to care and strengthen the overall health and resilience of Isabella County.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

McLaren Central Michigan Breathes New Life Into Community Through Grant

As Isabella County's only hospital and the city's only designated trauma center, McLaren Central Michigan is working to keep more critical care close to home. The hospital recently sought support to purchase four new critical-care ventilators, an essential step toward its goal of serving as a central hub for residents' health care needs.

"With McLaren Central Michigan being the only hospital in Isabella County, providing this level of care to our community is important," said Nicole Sanders, director of marketing and business development. "Securing these capabilities ensures our community members can receive critical care close to home."

Founded in 1943, McLaren Central Michigan has evolved through multiple renovations and expansions, including the addition of a cancer center and birthing center and, more recently, an emergency department renovation and related additions. To stay on the leading edge of patient care, clinical engineers routinely monitor and service hospital equipment. During those checks, they identified that the hospital's ventilators were nearing expiration.

Critical-care ventilators are life-support devices used in the ICU to provide full or partial mechanical breathing support for patients with severe respiratory failure following trauma or illness, and they are often used for patients post-surgery.

Funding for the ventilators was supported through the McLaren Central Michigan Fund (Designated Fund), established in 1997 by then President and CEO Mark Cwiek and sustained by year-round giving from families, patients, and staff.

The ventilator upgrade also aligns with a broader effort to bring more services in-house so patients can access more of their care under one roof while maintaining a high standard of care. McLaren Central Michigan's primary service area includes Clare and Isabella counties, and the hospital has expanded by recruiting more than 20 new health care providers to Mt. Pleasant.

> "Securing these capabilities ensures our community members can receive critical care close to home."
>
> - **Nicole Sanders,** *director of marketing and business development*



Community Engagement

A thriving community is built on more than infrastructure. It is built on relationships, shared identity, and a sense of belonging. In Isabella County, strengthening community engagement helps foster trust, connection, and pride in the place we call home. The Foundation plays a key role in bringing people together to build a stronger, more connected community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Bonny's Clean Up Crew

After her mother, Bonny, died, Julie Lyon searched for a way to carry her grief - and her mother's love of local parks - into something lasting. On June 6, 2021, she launched Bonny's Clean Up Crew, a team that dedicates one hour of cleaning up local parks every Sunday, with volunteers in purple shirts (the Alzheimer's awareness color) and sunflowers, Bonny's favorite flower. The project quickly turned into a local movement.

Lyon ordered just three shirts for that first cleanup. The next week, five people came. Then seven. Then 13. Now the crew averages about 18 volunteers each week, drawing participants from all over the state including Central Michigan University students and local high schoolers logging community-service hours. In a typical cleanup, they collect an average of 13 biodegradable 10-gallon bags of trash. The 2025 record: 33 volunteers at a single cleanup.

"People see our purple shirts and when they hear about the mission, they want to be a part of what we are doing," Lyon said.

After funding the effort herself since its inception, Lyon established Bonny's Clean Up Crew as a nonprofit in June 2025 and began seeking support. A grant from the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation's Community Impact Fund last fall helped replace well-used grabbers and purchase additional volunteer shirts, a year's supply of biodegradable bags, rubber gloves and buckets. The crew has also received donations from the Mt. Pleasant Jaycees and Great Lakes Great Responsibility, earned Sacred Heart's Volunteer of the Month, and been featured in the Morning Sun and Epicenter.

Individuals and organizations can request cleanups through the group's Facebook page, where weekly locations are posted. All volunteers are welcome - all that's needed is a good attitude and good walking shoes. "Since we started this initiative, we've collected over 15,000 gallons of trash. We are so grateful for the community support and grants we have received. I know my mom might hate the attention, but she would really appreciate the beautification in her honor of the places she loved."



» *Photo courtesy of Bonny's Cleanup Crew*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Giving Back to the Game: MPHS Softball Stadium Renovation Powered by Local Support

This spring, Mt. Pleasant Public Schools varsity softball players took the field at Mt. Pleasant High School on a newly renovated facility, the first of its kind since the field was built in 2001.

Longtime program champion Julie Maxon, a former Mt. Pleasant High School and CMU softball player and current middle school teacher, has carried the sport with her for decades and her commitment traces back even further. More than 50 years ago, her mother launched the Mt. Pleasant Youth Softball program after noticing a lack of summer opportunities for girls, keeping costs low to ensure access for all families.

Two years ago, Maxon and colleagues formed a committee to fund the high school field renovation. The effort began with alumni outreach, supported by detailed records kept by longtime coach Ted McIntyre for whom the fields are named. Alumni responded generously, helping the committee sell 104 seats as a cornerstone fundraiser.

From there, the committee pursued additional fundraising and in-kind support. A grant from the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation's Women's Initiative Fund (Field of Interest), Theunissen Family Fund, David B. and Susan K. Keilitz Family Fund, Dr. Leonard and Lousie A. Plachta Unrestricted Fund, and the G. Charles and Janice L. Hubscher Fund, and the Community Impact Fund (all Community Impact Funds) helped bring the project across the finish line.





"The funds from the Foundation allowed us to finalize this project," Maxon said. "This was the last piece we needed to move forward and make it happen."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

New Youth Chorus Expands Music Access for Mt. Pleasant Kids

"People often think the arts are a 'luxury,' but we think of them as a necessity," said Amy C. Powell, executive director of Art Reach. "Music is a universal language, one that unites us."

Powell began building that vision close to home. Inspired by her own children's interest in music and a lack of specialized local options." In early 2025, she drafted a business plan and spent the year recruiting: promoting the program at the local Farmers Market, summer reading events and back-to-school programs and encouraging schools to share flyers in the digital folders sent to families.

The Art Reach Youth Chorus is open to students ages 8 to 10, and thanks to support from the Bandit Industries Community Fund, the Fabiano Family Fund, and the Schafer Community Impact Fund (all Community Impact Funds), no child is turned away based on ability to pay. The inaugural fall session enrolled 26 students.

The program provides training that many children wouldn't otherwise have access to unless they took private voice lessons. Instruction includes healthy vocal technique to protect developing voices, including breathing, "chest voice" and "head voice," and the physical skills needed to sustain singing and standing during performances, alongside music theory and music history.

Powell's goal is both immediate and long-term: give younger singers a strong foundation now and strengthen future school and community choral programs as these students move into broader ensembles. Her longer-range hope is to expand choral opportunities for all ages, including the youngest learners. "I believe that everyone can sing, they just need the proper training and support," she said.



> "Music is a universal language, one that unites us."
>
> **- Amy C. Powell,** *executive director of Art Reach*

» *Photos courtesy of Art Reach of Central Michigan*



Building Stronger Nonprofits, *Together*

Strong nonprofits form the backbone of a vibrant community. This year, the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation prioritized opportunities for local organizations to learn, connect, and grow.





» *Photos courtesy of the United Way of Greater Central Michigan*

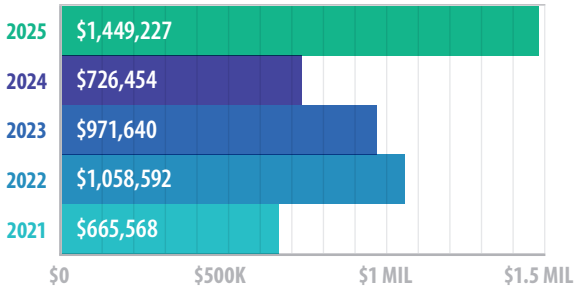
- We provide our nonprofit partners with access to an online platform called **Catchafire**. Through collaboration with Community Foundations and United Ways in the Great Lakes Bay Region, all area non-profit organizations have access to an online tool that allows them to tap into skilled volunteers for support with a multitude of projects, such as marketing, finance, and strategic planning.
- We hosted **Nonprofit Advocacy Strategies 101**, helping organizations better understand how to engage in advocacy, which is a must for securing funding, influencing policy, and building relationships.
- In partnership with the United Way of Greater Central Michigan, we revived our **Nonprofit Executive Roundtables**, now held six times a year. Leaders exchange ideas, address challenges, and learn collaboratively.
- In November, we hosted the first-ever **Community Impact Showcase** in partnership with the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce and United Way of Greater Central Michigan. Fifty nonprofit and service organizations came together to connect with the community and share the work they are doing every day across Isabella County.

Foundation grants $1.4 million to Isabella County initiatives

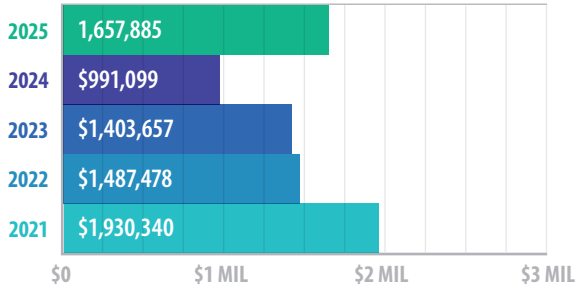
For 35 years, philanthropy has helped build a stronger Isabella County. In 2025, more than $1.6 million was entrusted to the Community Foundation by individuals, families, businesses, and groups and over $1.4 million was awarded through grants and scholarships. Today's generosity is tomorrow's opportunity.

> "I am proud to be a part of creating a lasting legacy to help those in need in our community."
>
> **- Tina Powell,** *Board of Trustees*

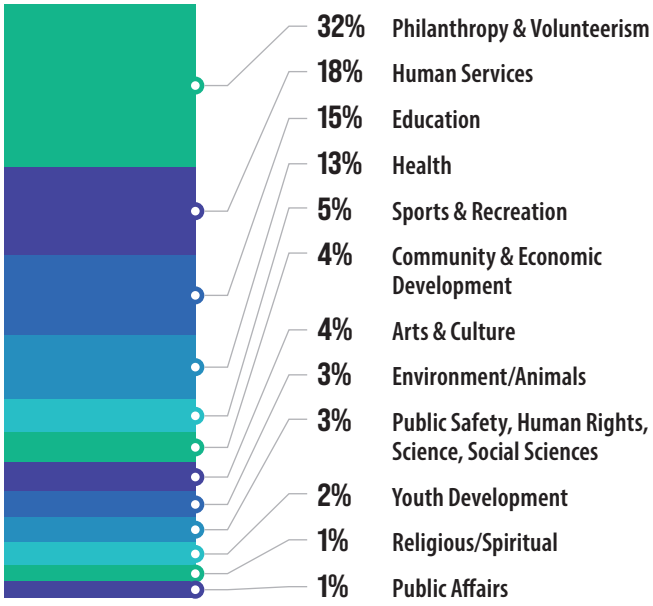
GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED



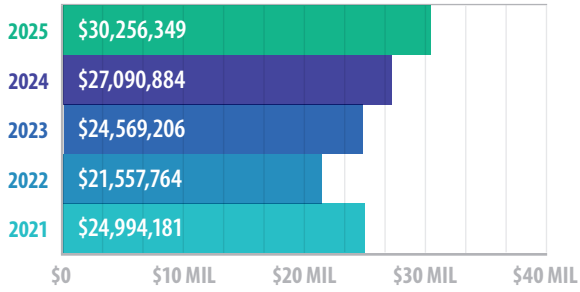
GIFTS/DONATIONS RECEIVED



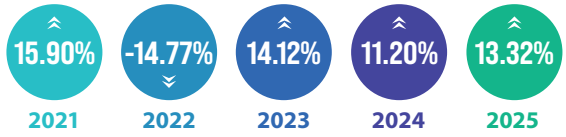
GRANTS AWARDED BY PROGRAM AREA, 2025



FOUNDATION NET ASSETS



INVESTMENT RETURNS



How does the Community Foundation work?

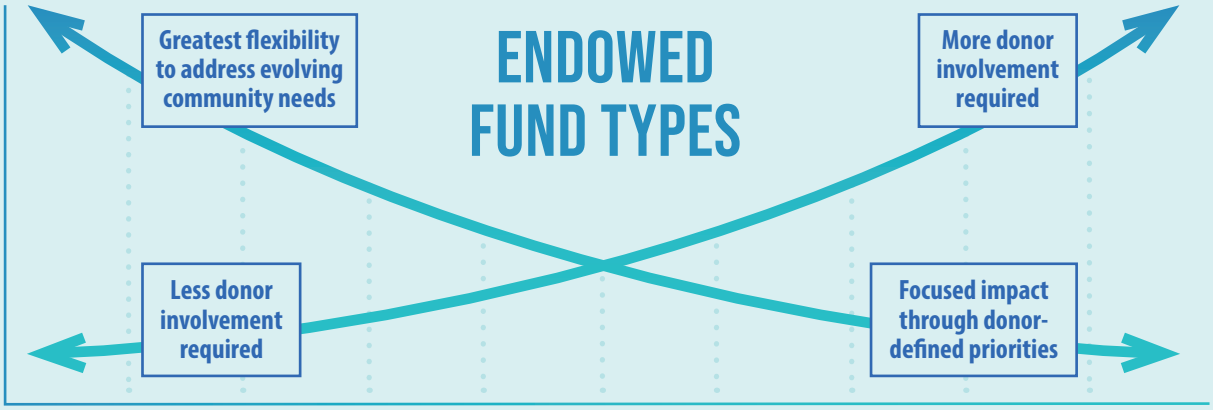
ATTRACT
We bring in generous individuals, families, and businesses committed to giving back.

INVEST
We manage funds strategically to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.

BUILD
We grow permanent endowment funds that provide lasting community support.

GRANT
We distribute funding to local charities to address pressing needs and to students expanding their education.

CONNECT
We serve as a hub for collaboration, leadership, and resource coordination.



	COMMUNITY IMPACT FUND	FIELD OF INTEREST FUND	ORGANIZATION FUND *(Designated or Agency)*	SCHOLARSHIP FUND	DONOR ADVISED FUND
PURPOSE	Addresses ever changing needs of community	Targets specific area of community life	Benefits specific charitable organization	Benefits individual according to specific guidelines	Addresses charitable interests of founders
REQUIRED	$10,000 in 10 years	$10,000 in 10 years	$10,000 in 10 years	$50,000 in 5 years	$10,000 in 10 years
FEE	1% annually	1% annually	1% annually	2% annually	2% annually

All contributions qualify for federal and Michigan tax incentives.
Contact us at 989-773-7322 or info@mpacf.org to discuss your options.


“Mt. Pleasant has been really good to us, and it is our honor to give back.”

Gary and Judy Ramsower's

Legacy of Building and Teaching

Gary and Judy Ramsower often say that Mt. Pleasant has been good to them. Their lives are woven into the town's fabric through Gary's construction/roofing and the thousands of students who learned life skills in Judy's classroom. When revising their family trust, they saw a way to ensure their love for Mt. Pleasant would endure. They turned to the Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation and joined the Denison Legacy Society, which recognizes individuals and couples who name the Foundation as a beneficiary of any planned gift.

The Ramsowers met at Central Michigan University in 1965, married two years later, and had two daughters. Early on, they struggled to find affordable housing, an experience that later shaped their giving priorities. Gary spent a decade teaching biology at Chippewa Hills High School and spent summers building homes with colleagues, honing the skills that led to his own construction business. Over the next 45 years, Gary Ramsower Builders left its mark on countless Mt. Pleasant homes and businesses. Judy taught home economics at West Middle School for 31 years, giving more than 12,000 students practical skills in cooking, sewing, and childcare. Together, the couple bought, rehabilitated, and rented more than 20 properties, taking pride in providing well-built, clean, and affordable homes for families in need.

While updating their trust, the Ramsowers realized they could do more. Conversations with Foundation staff introduced them to planned giving options, such as bequests and charitable trusts, which allow donors to achieve philanthropic goals while supporting cherished causes. A planned gift creates or adds to an existing endowed fund whose earnings provide grants year after year, advancing the Foundation's mission of enhancing life "now and for generations to come." The Ramsowers chose to direct their legacy gift toward food security, affordable housing, mental health issues, and violence and sexual assault support, reflecting their own experiences and values. By endowing their gift, they ensure future generations will benefit from the support they need.

The Denison Legacy Society was created to honor Rollie and Olga Denison and encourages others to follow their example by making planned gifts. Members are thanked publicly and invited to special events. Gary and Judy see their membership as a natural continuation of the lives they have led. "Mt. Pleasant has been really good to us, and it is our honor to give back," Gary said. By investing in the community's needs today and tomorrow, they are ensuring that the town they helped build - both physically and figuratively - continues to thrive. Their story reinforces the Foundation's mission and invites others to consider how planned giving can create "ripples of hope and inspiration" for generations to come.

To explore options or discuss your gift, please contact Liz Conway, Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation CEO/COO, at 989-773-7322 or lconway@mpacf.org.

Scan for a list of The Denison Legacy Society members.

Scan for a complete list of our generous donors who gave gifts of $100 or more in 2025.

Mt. Pleasant Area
community foundation℠
For **good.** For **ever.**℠
306 S. University • P.O. Box 1283
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804-1283
www.mpacf.org

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MT. PLEASANT, MI
PERMIT 110

MT. PLEASANT AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

2025 Sponsors

PLATINUM

- Robert and Jeanne Long
- Mike and Dianne Morey
- Janet Maar Strickler

GOLD

McGuirk Family

Dyke and Phyllis Heinze • Linda Morey • W.E. Martin Foundation

SILVER

- Fore Energy Partners, Inc.
- Alan and Kathy Johns
- Jena Eisenberger – Edward Jones

BRONZE

Kurt and Julie Feight • John and Sue Bradac • Marie K. Green • John and Ann Jensen • Al and Linda Kaufmann • Terry and Diane Kunst
Beth Miller and Bruce LaPointe • Erin and Phil Ludwig • Steve and Sue Pung • Mark and Shelly Smith • Jim and Carol Wojcik • Wildfire Credit Union