SUMMER LEARNING ACADEMIES
Identifying new avenues to provide educational opportunities to both children and parents.

DONOR FEATURE: GIL WATERS
How one man left a charitable legacy to impact a community he cared so much about.

THE GIVING CHALLENGE
Creating a culture of community-engaged philanthropy.

ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIPS
An investment in education is an investment in our community’s future.
Dear Friends:

Being a resource to shape your charitable giving fueled by generosity, meaningful passions, and a focus on results for the greater good is what the Community Foundation of Sarasota County gets to achieve every day. We think of it as community impact powered by philanthropy. There is no greater joy than knowing that each and every person can impact another person, a cause, a community. We thank you for being the one to make a difference.

By partnering with donors like you, we can ensure that our community thrives, addresses the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors, and finds innovative solutions to causes and issues that affect our region.

Starting with this Fall Newsletter, we will update you more frequently about the many accomplishments happening because of our donors’ generosity. Be on the lookout for a Spring Newsletter as well, as we share inspiring stories that demonstrate the power of thoughtful giving.

A bit about what you’ll learn in this issue: this summer we achieved some significant milestones by the generosity of not only our donors, but our community as a whole. The 2018 Giving Challenge infused $11.7 million into our local non-profit organizations to strengthen their work and provide support for their important missions; the Sarasota County School District expanded the Summer Learning Academy model to all Title 1 schools in the district, which Community Foundation donors originally set out to prove that significant results could be accomplished in closing the achievement gap; and the Community Foundation was proud to provide more than $2 million in scholarships to both traditional students and adult learners in our community.

We hope you enjoy reading about just some of the success stories that we have achieved together with you. As always, we are here to listen and to help you “Be the One” through your thoughtful philanthropy, just as we have been for 39 years and will continue to be for generations to come.

Gratefully,

LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENT/CEO

Roxanne G. Jerde, President and CEO
Richard R. Gans, Board Chair
Summer is often anything but a vacation for the more than half of Sarasota County school students who come from low-income households. Instead of a time to build new experiences or attend enriching summer camps, it’s often a period when children and families struggle to afford even the most basic necessities and to find opportunities to improve learning.

Lack of access to stimulating learning activities leads to summer learning loss, when students lose academic skills during their time away from school. This loss can lead to many debilitating effects on a young person’s success in school. It’s also a key reason why the achievement gap between children from low-income households and their peers from medium and high-income households continues to increase.

In 2012, donors Joe and Mary Kay Henson envisioned a way to prove that students living in poverty could perform as well as their higher-income peers if given equal opportunity and the right school resources. The Hensons worked with Alta Vista principal Dr. Barbara Shirley to fund and create a summer learning pilot program for rising kindergarten students. Once they saw the initial success, they brought the idea to the Community Foundation to explore a partnership to achieve a wider and greater impact. Philanthropy would fuel an innovative solution to a problem that did not have state and federal funding.

A six-week Summer Learning Academy (SLA) was born, dubbed the Eagle Academy, to provide additional educational opportunities for the students of the inaugural class. The SLA offered academic activities, food, books and enrichment activities. A social worker also identified needs and provided assistance and resources for students and their families.

It was easy to see that the program worked. The children’s academic skills and classroom engagement improved, and relationships grew between parents and the school. Alta Vista became recognized as a community-wide school that involved and supported parents as much as students.

Following the success at Alta Vista, the Hensons persuaded the Sarasota County School District to expand the academies to three more Title 1 elementary schools (Emma E. Booker, Tuttle, and Gocio) the following year. The Community Foundation and many generous donors provided additional support. During this time, average iReady scores (an adaptive assessment tool used by Sarasota County Schools that uses scale scores to track student learning gains) for SLA
students improved more than those of their peers who did not attend a summer learning program.

In the fall of 2017, armed with data and proof points from these initially philanthropically-supported academies, the Superintendent and other Sarasota County School District staff visited Tallahassee and successfully lobbied to secure state funding required to establish Summer Learning Academies in all 11 Title 1 schools across Sarasota County for summer 2018. More than 1,100 elementary school students enriched summer learning opportunities and kept summer slide at bay.

While the children benefitted directly, the program had a positive impact on the larger family. Parents financial and parental worries were eased by knowing their children were in a safe learning environment at no cost. Parents also had the opportunity to attend weekly “parent universities” that offered working sessions on financial sustainability, nutrition and cooking and navigating the education system.

The ability to improve the lives of families across multiple generations is at the heart of the Community Foundation’s initiatives to improve grade-level reading. Over the years, we have led the way to identify and develop additional opportunities at these different schools based on parent interests for professional certifications in nursing and trades. In the last two years, more than 250 parents connected with multi-generational initiatives have obtained a certificate or degree to further their education, financial literacy and/or workforce training.

This work continues to evolve as we focus on identifying ways to connect families to educational opportunities. Thanks to donors like Joe and Mary Kay Henson, individual passions for helping families through education are being realized through philanthropy. Passionate donors are working with the Community Foundation to drive systemic change that benefits the entire community.

“Through a shared vision and a dream, our 2Gen programs have transformed the culture of our school community. They have instilled a sense of pride where our teachers, staff, parents, and community have become integral stakeholders in the education of our students. Our students and families are developing a passion for learning, a love of school, and a hope for a future where children and their parents can achieve their dreams together.”

– Dr. Barbara Shirley, Principal, Alta Vista Elementary School
Gilbert “Gil” Waters built bridges, figuratively and literally. Most who knew him knew that he was constantly developing grass-roots campaigns to make big changes in Sarasota and beyond, like the Downtown Improvement Plan, which gave us Marina Jack, Bayfront Park, and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. His most notable accomplishment was his fight for the creation of the John Ringling Causeway Bridge, which opened in 2003 and has a plaque on it in his honor.

Gil’s childhood years took him from Pennsylvania to Connecticut and New York. A graduate of Yale and a Navy Veteran, Gil settled in Sarasota County, working initially as a reporter for the Herald-Tribune. His job spurred his curiosity about the issues that concerned our community and ignited a passion in him for a brighter future for all. His drive for civic engagement helped him to become a Sarasota City commissioner, a member of the Sarasota County School Board, and a founder of the FCCI insurance company.

Gil was a natural connector in the community, and it wasn’t long before that he met then president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Stewart Stearns. The pair became instant friends and the Community Foundation partnered on many of Gil’s civic ventures.

He spent countless hours volunteering and providing his expertise for nonprofits like Sarasota Orchestra, Pines of Sarasota, New College of Florida, Sarasota Military Academy, and many others. Just as giving as he was with his time and talent, so was Gil with his treasure. He never hesitated to support the causes he deeply cared about.

In his later years, Gil began to think about how he could continue to make a difference in the community after he would no longer be with us. Working with the Community Foundation, Gil created a Charitable Remainder Trust to receive an immediate tax deduction and a guaranteed income stream for life. Under the conditions of the trust, Gil established a Future Fund to ensure that his gift would continue to support the many nonprofit organizations he cared about into perpetuity.

Earlier in January this year, our community was saddened when Gil Waters passed away at the age of 90. Through his foresight and planning, Gil’s charitable gifts will continue to strengthen 15 local nonprofits annually, and to support the Community Foundation’s operating expenses.

His gift made an immediate impact this summer. For three weeks each June, internationally-recognized guest artists and student musicians come together in Florida to study and perform chamber music as part of the Sarasota Music Festival, a program of the Sarasota Orchestra. The event was one of Gil’s most treasured passions in Sarasota. Through his estate plan, Gil’s fund helped underwrite this year’s festival in his memory. Because of his charitable legacy, 60 students from top music programs across the country were able to work side-by-side with a group of 40 guest music masters, performing for hundreds of people in our community.

This is only the beginning of what Gil’s estate plan will be able to accomplish through his partnership with the Community Foundation. His commitment to making Sarasota a better place to live for all drove his passion in life, and now, through his philanthropic legacy, will continue to follow that mission. For that, we give Gil a standing ovation.

“I want to do something inspiring to change the world.”
- Gil Waters

Donor Feature: Gil Waters
“We were able to launch an innovative back-to-school pilot program for foster care kids. The Giving Challenge provided the flexibility for us to try something new.”
– Svetlana Kaminsky, Children’s Guardian Fund

Philanthropy: The Giving Challenge

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION

When President and CEO Roxie Jerde first came to the Community Foundation of Sarasota County from Kansas City in March of 2011, she immediately saw the vibrant philanthropic spirit of the Sarasota community. This led her to ask an important question: “How can we build trust between donors and the organizations they support and promote the importance of nonprofit transparency?”

In 2012, The Giving Partner was launched as an online tool to use free-of-charge to find in-depth information on local nonprofit organizations’ programs, leadership, development needs, and financial history. While the build-out of the tool alone was a significant undertaking, the next step was to maintain the commitment of local organizations to keep a transparent and up-to-date profile. The solution was found in the “Giving Challenge.”

At the time, local “Give Days” were building popularity in communities all across the country. The concept is simple – a time-bound online fundraising challenge that rallies people around a particular region, cause, holiday/event, or place of education. With the ingrained generosity of our four-county region, it only made sense to bring a Give Day to our community.

The Giving Challenge provided a perfect way to help promote The Giving Partner. In 2012 the first 100 participating organizations shared their program results, leadership information, and financial history to create their Giving Partner profiles. More than 650 local nonprofits now have active Giving Partner profiles.

In addition to promoting transparency, we also found the Giving Challenge was the perfect tool to tap into our community’s giving spirit and to encourage personal philanthropy at all levels of giving. In the first year of the Giving Challenge, $2.4 million was raised from more than 10,700 donors to benefit 109 local nonprofits. There was so much excitement around that year’s Challenge that the $334,000 in matching funds The Patterson Foundation generously provided was met in just four minutes. It was clear the Giving Challenge was an opportunity our community could get behind and one that everyone owned.

Since then, the Giving Challenge has grown to match the generosity of our region. The last Giving Challenge held in May 2018 raised an astonishing $11.7 million from almost 50,000 individual donors in just 24 hours – one of the largest giving days of its kind in the Southeastern United States. The average gift was $90 with half of the more than 74,000 gifts under $50. The Giving Challenge promotes the philosophy that all of our citizens can be the one to make a difference.

While the numbers are impressive, the real story behind the Giving Challenge is what organizations are able to do with the support they receive and how the impact is locally realized. Giving Challenge funds are unrestricted, flexible, and provide an influx of cash flow as fundraising slows for the summer. The funds raised in the Giving Challenge has allowed nonprofits to fill gaps, fund passion projects, and experiment with innovative programs. The funds fixed leaking roofs, provided hope for homeless youth, purchased adoption vans for animal shelters, and protected wildlife on land and in water. The stories of impact are endless.

We are thrilled to announce that we will be continuing the Giving Challenge’s legacy of community generosity by hosting the next Giving Challenge in April, 2020. In the meantime, we will be supporting the nonprofit community in capacity-building initiatives, as well as continue awarding grants of various levels to fulfill needs outlined in nonprofit Giving Partner profiles.

“The unrestricted funding has allowed us to cover needs that aren’t always as attractive to pitch to donors. Thanks to The Giving Challenge we were able to purchase a van so we could take some of our shows on the road to other communities around Florida.”
– Melody Mora-Shihadeh, Florida Studio Theatre
Higher education is changing. Rising tuition and the high cost of other expenses required for college are now just a few of the many obstacles college students encounter when trying to attain their educational aspirations.

Since 1979, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County strongly focused our grant making around education and college scholarships. For donors who believe that all who wish to further their education and increase future potential for success should have an equal chance to take advantage of the opportunities available to them, the Community Foundation’s scholarship program has grown to become one of the largest of its kind in Florida. This summer we reached a milestone by awarding more than $2 million to hundreds of traditional students and adult learners.

These scholarships have been awarded to students as young as 12 and as old as 50 for college tuition, assistance to attend trade schools, camps for performing artists who intend to become professionals, or special workshops that are vital to a student’s future career.

Our march toward reaching this point began five years ago with the help of a task force charged with ensuring the scholarships awarded brought the greatest benefit to the recipients. Rather than simply increasing the volume of scholarships awarded, the task force examined other success measures to track the improvement scholarships had on graduation rates. The volunteer group discovered several opportunities to augment the impact of our scholarship program.

What stood out first and foremost is that our scholarships have been heavily-focused on first-year students, while support for the remaining years reduced. With our ultimate goal being student achievement and graduation, not just beginning a college program, the research paved the way toward restructuring our scholarships. Today, we focus on renewable scholarships that extend beyond freshman years. We found this encourages continued advancement by our scholarship awardees. At the same time, there was growth in the amount of the scholarships awarded as donors became aware of the ever-expanding cost of post-secondary education in today’s world. Many of today’s students are working full-time and have various family obligations in addition to attending school. Broader, renewable scholarships that cover tuition, books, and ancillary costs help keep our students focused on graduation.

Looking ahead, the task force has recommended developing a support system for our students. A “success coach” pilot is currently in development. The purpose of the program is to connect students with coaches to offer career and life advice and help students navigate challenges they encounter, both in school, and in life.

Earl Young, Manager of Scholarships & Special Initiatives for the Community Foundation, was himself a working student when he was enrolled at the University of South Florida pursuing his degree in finance. From his own experiences in hearing stories from the students he works with, Earl knows that the personal mentoring program has the potential to guide students into adulthood in deeply meaningful ways. Already, thank you cards, letters, photos and printed emails from scholarship recipients line the walls of Earl’s office. A recent favorite is a notecard from a student thanking the Community Foundation for helping him realize his lifetime dream to become a firefighter. He included a childhood photo of himself wearing a firefighter’s helmet.

It is personal connections like this that showcase the impact and nurturing ability of our scholarship program. Thanks are due to our donors who are providing opportunities for students to empower themselves through continued education.
LEADERSHIP

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