

Summer 2024

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Lessons from the Trail: How a Scenic Trail System Fosters Vibrant Communities and Economic Growth



August 12, 2024

By Laura Fitzgerald

If you take a walk, run, or bike ride along the Bridge to Bay Trail (B2B) in St. Clair County, you'll experience more than just beautiful scenery. Stretching over 50 miles, this trail offers views of massive freighters and sailboats gliding along the blue waters of the St. Clair River and Lake Huron. Natural beaches and wetlands are home to various birds and amphibians, while fishermen cast their lines as families and friends stroll, bike, and skate along the trail.

But the B2B Trail is more than just a place for recreation. It connects twelve municipalities and winds through multiple downtowns, drawing residents and visitors to the small businesses that line its path.

Over the last ten years, it's estimated that over \$180 million has been invested in 60 different public and private projects along the trail. These projects include everything from restaurants and entertainment venues to housing, hotels, and retail stores. While this estimate is impressive, the actual number is likely even higher.

"The investments along the Bridge to Bay corridor over these last ten years may exceed any other ten-year timeframe," said Randy Maiers, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County.

A History of the Trail

The B2B Trail was conceived in the early 1990s by the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission.

The goal was to link the county's communities along the Great Lakes coastline.

"Back then, the county's waterfront wasn't as fully utilized for its economic and recreational potential as it is today," said Sheri Faust, Director of Friends of the St. Clair River.

In 2017, a new coalition of stakeholders formed a Regional Trails Board and began updating the trail's plan after a benchmarking trip to the TART Trails in Traverse City. Friends of the St. Clair River took the lead to implement the plan, with significant support from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation and the Community Foundation of St. Clair County. Today, about half of the trail has been paved, with work on the remaining sections ongoing.

Investments along the B2B Corridor

For many, the trail's potential for economic impact and community vibrancy has always been a primary goal. Randy Maiers, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, admitted he was initially skeptical about the trail's economic impact but now sees it as a driver of growth and prosperity.

"We have proof that a large regional trail system makes an economic difference."

Since 2014, investments along the B2B corridor include:

- Housing: \$52 million
- Hotels: \$50 million
- Restaurants: \$10 million
- Retail: \$5 million
- Education: \$8.7 million
- Recreation: Over \$11 million
- Trail Sections: \$12.3 million
- Entertainment: \$33.5 million
- Business Development/
Coworking Spaces: \$7.75 million

St. Clair County Economic Development Alliance CEO Dan Casey said trails and the investments along them create a quality sense of place through the recreational and economic activities they provide. Investments also diversify the jobs, services, and amenities available to residents and visitors, which strengthens the economy.

In Port Huron, significant projects include a \$15 million investment in City Flats Hotel and \$1.2 million in McMorran Place Plaza. The Plaza

is a bustling center of activity at the outdoor bar, music venue, splash pad and in the winter around the ice rink. Another notable project is Wrigley Hall and Entertainment Center, a \$14 million development that transformed a vacant warehouse into a vibrant mixed-use space with a food hall, entertainment venue, and 36 loft style apartments.

Downtown St. Clair has also seen various improvements, including over \$800,000 invested in the revitalization of Riverview Plaza's courtyard by the Community Foundation and the opening of several new businesses like Anchor Point Bistro, War Water Brewery and most recently the Hamlin Pub.



Boardwalk Theatre

St. Clair City Manager Quentin Bishop said, "The city's bustling downtown is a far cry from its struggling past, and the B2B Trail leads right to its heart. We've seen the value of placemaking in creating quality of life and fostering a distinct culture."

Marine City and Marysville have also benefited from the trail, with major investments in hotels, restaurants, and recreational amenities. These projects are helping to create a quality sense of place,



St. Clair Plaza

attracting people to live locally, work locally, and enjoy the area.

Major investments in Marine City include the opening of The Inn on Water Street, expansions to the Marine City Fish Company restaurant, and the opening or planning of three condominium/apartment complexes.

Currently, Marine City is building out a public marina on the Belle River as an offshoot of the trail, which City Manager Scott Atkins said will be a major recreational attraction for boaters, kayakers, fishermen, and other people looking to enjoy the area's natural resources.

"The Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation and our local community foundation continue to be critical partners to the growth of both Marine City and our entire region," said Atkins.

Later this year a new micro hotel, perched on the edge of Marysville Park, and the scenic route of the B2B trail, will open for bookings. A unique, cozy stay in what used to be the city's historical museum, offers 5 suites and stunning views of the St. Clair River.

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Blue Water River Walk

The hotel will help fill a gap in the local economy by providing a small-town getaway for an area with few hotels and vacation rentals that will have easy access to a nearly-completed outdoor amphitheater.

“The Bridge to Bay Corridor is the key to our region’s financial growth,” Maiers said. “It is the engine that drives our economy.” He added that the region seems to be attracting more interest and attention from visitors and tourists in the Metro Detroit area, who come from less than an hour away to enjoy the unique waterfront downtowns and trails.

Bridge to Bay Trail Fosters Stewardship & Social Opportunities

The B2B Trail does more than boost the local economy—it also fosters social opportunities and environmental stewardship. The trail is accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, connecting communities and creating shared spaces.

“People are more likely to take care of places that are special to them if they can access them,” said Faust. The trail encourages people to care for the area’s natural assets, whether it’s a quiet spot by the shore or a favorite bird-watching location. In this way, the trail serves as a pathway for recreation, conservation, and stewardship.

In this way, the trail serves as a pathway for recreation, conservation, and stewardship.

Conclusion

The Bridge to Bay Trail progression shows how community engagement and strategic planning can drive economic growth, enhance quality of life, and promote environmental stewardship. As the trail continues to grow, so too will the communities it connects, ensuring a bright and sustainable future for St. Clair County and its residents. The B2B Trail is not just a scenic route; it’s a vital corridor for recreation, social interaction, and economic prosperity, proving that the benefits of trails go far beyond their natural beauty.

Dear Randy $\frac{1}{2}$ Grants Committee,

Thank you for our recent grant of \$29,000 to support our work for the Bridge to Bay Trail.

We're excited and grateful to continue to build out our region's premium waterfront trail.

Generations to come will be able to enjoy the St. Clair River's natural beauty, sunrises and endless opportunities for recreation.

Thank you! Shlei Faerst

Dear scholarship donor,

I am writing to express my gratitude to you for making the Howard A. Acheson Memorial Fund Scholarship possible. I am very appreciative of your support and am honored to be a recipient of this scholarship. Receiving this scholarship will help me immensely in my college journey.

For the 2024-25 school year, I will be returning to Kettering University as a Senior to continue my education as a mechanical engineering major with a concentration in automotive engineering and design. As part of Kettering's co-op program, I am currently employed at Lear Corporation in Southfield, MI. I am part of the E-Systems division, working with automotive power distribution systems and vehicle electrification. This allows me to gain valuable hands-on experience in my career field to supplement traditional classroom instruction. This is my eighth working rotation at Lear, and I now have about 2 years of work experience in my field of study. I have recently begun working on my senior thesis project, involving prevention of warpage in injection molded plastic parts, and plan to complete it before returning to school for my final semester.

This scholarship will greatly reduce the amount of debt I have to take on to continue my education at Kettering. Because of your generosity, I will be able to focus more on my academic performance without worrying as much about my financial situation. I cannot thank you enough.

Sincerely,
James DeVolder

Dear Scholarship committee,

My name is Emmaline Shivers, and I received your River District Hospital Auxiliary McFern-Smeltzer Scholarship. I wanted to personally thank you for helping me pursue my dreams of becoming a labor and delivery nurse. I would not be able to achieve this dream without the help of generous donors such as you!

Sincerely,
Emmaline Shivers
♡

Dear Community Foundation on behalf of the Webb scholarship, I cannot begin to express my gratitude for being chosen as one of this years recipients. With the help of this gift I am able to start my journey at SC4 stress free. I am so excited to start

my classes this fall and begin my path to further my education. Thanks to the webb scholarship I will be less concerned with financing the pursuit of my dream career. It is safe to say there were many happy tears shed when we heard the news. Thank you so much for this extremely generous gift!

-Rylee Zold ♡

July 20, 2024

Re: Douglas and Elda Webb Scholarship
Dear Scholarship Donor,

I am writing this letter to convey my gratitude for the \$2,500.00 Douglas and Elda Webb Scholarship for the 2024-2025 school year. Being selected among some of the most deserving awardees is an honor.

I would like to thank the Douglas and Elda Webb Scholarship for assisting me throughout my undergraduate career. I am grateful to be awarded this scholarship, and your kind donation will help me cover the cost of my books and tuition for the forthcoming school year. By giving me this scholarship, you have lessened my financial obligation, enabling me to concentrate more on studying, which is the most crucial component of education.

Here at St. Clair County Community College, I'm majoring in nursing. I intend to graduate from SC4's nursing program in 2026, and I am currently a nursing student in my first semester! I will push myself to maintain a high standard of academic performance every semester going ahead, and being awarded this scholarship will make it less difficult to reach those objectives. Your kindness is much valued and graciously received. Following graduation, my goal is to pass the NCLEX and obtain a job in Texas, where I also intend to pursue my BSN. This will allow me to further my knowledge of helping others in need around the world.

I sincerely appreciate your support with this scholarship. With the help of this scholarship, I can concentrate on my academics and future educational goals. I am motivated to lend a hand and give back to the community by your kindness. As you have assisted me, I hope that one day I will be able to assist students in achieving their goals. Your generosity not only gives financial assistance, but it also promotes equitable opportunity, ensures students' creative and intellectual progress, and demonstrates trust in education's ability to change individuals and the world.

Sincerely,



Pajja Broderick



Dear Community Foundation,

Thank you so much for the Alexander and Celestine Lamere Scholarship. I'm excited to start my education at SC4 and this will relieve a lot of my financial burden. I will keep you updated on my progress. Thank you again, Evan Martin

Thank you so much for your selection of me as a recipient of the Christian B. & Agness A. Haas Memorial Scholarship. I am so grateful for the Community Foundation's consistent involvement in furthering my education.

Thank you!

Andrey Hollenbaugh



Community Foundation increasing support for outdoor recreation projects

June 4, 2024

Community Foundation of St. Clair County has significantly increased its focus and support for outdoor recreation projects over the last couple of years. Its most recent efforts will target the smaller communities within St. Clair County and will include free consulting help.

“Our smallest communities don’t have the luxury of having grant writers or full-time planning and development staff,” said Randy Maiers, President & CEO of the Community Foundation. “So they’re often left out of State and Federal funding when it’s available.”

In addition to the Foundation’s focus on supporting the completion of the Bridge to Bay Trail system, it has provided significant funding for outdoor recreation projects over the last couple of years. Highlights of recent grants include:

- \$25,000 for a new pocket park in Capac which included help from the DTE Energy Foundation and Capac received another \$15,000 from the Four County Community Foundation
- \$47,000 for improvements to River Park in East China from its St. Clair Endowments
- \$140,000 for improvements to Klecha Park in St. Clair, also from its St. Clair Endowments
- \$465,000 for three projects in Marine City which included their Tot Lot, Belle River Fishing Pier and the new Marine City Marina. A large portion of this grant funding came from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, which has been a longtime partner of the Community Foundation.

This past March the Foundation convened a meeting of representatives from a variety of smaller communities to talk about supporting their capacity to seek out other grant funding sources.

“We’re just a small community” said Cindy Paparelli, East China Township Manager. “We don’t have the internal capacity to put together strong grant proposals, so we are incredibly appreciative of the Community Foundation and what they’re doing for the smaller communities in St. Clair County. We are very excited to make these improvements at River Park, which will give the residents and general public even more prime access to waterfront recreation.”

“There’s just not enough attention paid to the public parks and outdoor recreation projects in our smaller communities,” added Maiers. “The Capac Pocket Park for example is a project that probably wouldn’t have happened if not for our Foundation and our friends at the Four County Community Foundation.”

Travis Youatt is the Village Manager for Capac, and he agrees. “Funding for art and new park projects is difficult for smaller communities like Capac; the budget just does not allow for it,” he said. “Smaller communities often get overlooked for these grants. This little Pocket Park may not seem significant to some people in bigger communities; however, it’s essential in our village and acts as a community hub for our residents and downtown. We’re blessed that both of our local community foundations saw the value and impact of our Pocket Park.”

The Foundation’s latest initiative is up and running currently, with eight smaller communities already either expressing interest or already working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the Community Foundation.

The Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation has been a funding partner with the Community Foundation for several years now on a wide range of outdoor recreation projects.

“Thanks to their continued support, along with other local individual donors, we are able to pay 100% of the costs for consultants to work with each of the communities for up to 30 hours,” Maiers added.



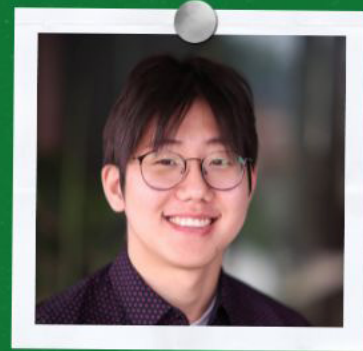
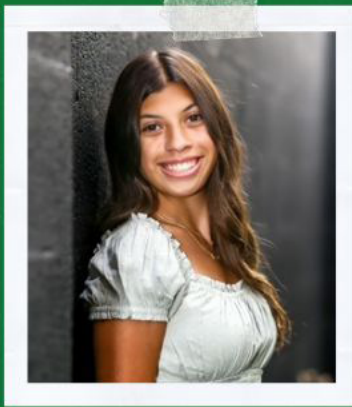
On a case-by-case basis the Foundation will also consider other upfront soft costs as these communities either finish their 5-year master recreation plan or fine tune engineering and feasibility plans.

“These small towns are what make Michigan’s Thumb Coast so unique,” said Maiers. “Our goal is to draw more attention to their needs in the hopes that more funding from the State of Michigan and other funders will follow.”

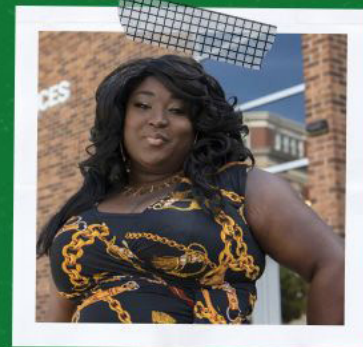
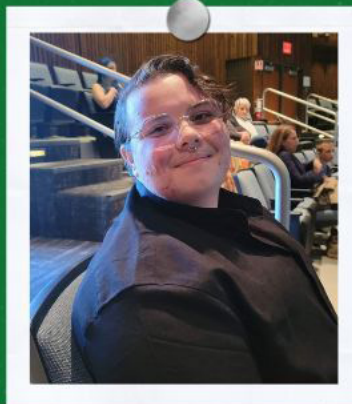


Over \$500,000 in scholarships awarded for the 2024/2025 school year

July 2, 2024



Scholarship
Recipients



The Community Foundation of St. Clair County has completed its latest round of scholarship awards for the upcoming 2024/2025 school year.

“We’re becoming much more proactive with young adults already in our program,” said Patti Manley, Foundation Board Chair. “This year out of our 148 total students, 95 were renewals as those students entered their 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th year of college.” Of those students, 52 would be 1st generation college graduates and 15 are non-traditional students; meaning they did not start their college career right after high school.

The Community Foundation manages 45 different scholarship funds which are expected to provide over \$500,000 in total support for the upcoming school year.

“There are so many obstacles that students face everyday as they try to obtain a college degree” said Jessica Flann, Program Officer for Post Secondary Success at the Community Foundation. “Giving a student a scholarship is a huge step in the process, but we want to be able to support these students through to degree completion. And to do that, we are continuing to support current students with renewable scholarship funding.”



Nicole Szczepanski, a 2023 graduate of Marysville High School and recipient of the Howard A. Acheson Memorial Fund, will be entering her second year at the University of Michigan where she is studying Biomedical Engineering. “I am currently studying

abroad in Rome. I have enjoyed my program so much so far! This opportunity was provided to me through the university and would not be possible without the generosity of the donors supporting my academic career.”

While in Rome Nicole is taking a class on Material Science and another on Art & Archaeology of Ancient Rome. “This trip has been an amazing learning opportunity as I have not only been studying but have been navigating a new city and culture.”

In addition to the continued support of current scholarship recipients, the Foundation also looks forward to working with area graduating seniors as they embark on their post-secondary education.

“Heading to Central Michigan University is an exciting step, and thanks to your scholarship, I can go at a fraction of the cost without the extra worry of college debt” said Brandon DeVos, a 2024 Memphis High School student and recipient of the St. Clair TEC



scholarship. “To me, your scholarship is more than money; it’s a vote of confidence. I’m ready to dive into college life, keep my grades strong, and continue to be an active member of the community. This scholarship is not only a boost for my education, but also a lesson in generosity. I hope to pass on the same kindness to others one day.”

The scholarship application is available year-round and students are encouraged to inquire about scholarships, life needs, and gap or emergency funding whenever their education journey might start.

Contact Jessica Flann, jessica@stclairfoundation.org, to learn more about opportunities for post-secondary success.

Thank you SO much for your generous contribution toward my education expenses. This memorial fund has been a blessing to me each year of my college career. As a rising junior studying biochemistry at the University of Michigan, your monetary aid has made a big difference in my college success. I've been working in a cancer biology research lab through Michigan Medicine for 8 months now. Without the Acheson scholarship, I wouldn't be able to work in this lab, because I'd have to take a part-time job to cover tuition. It means so much to me that your generosity has opened new doors of academic opportunity. I am forever grateful for the aid I've been given in honor of Mr. Acheson's legacy. Please reach out to me at my email if you ever have any questions or want more updates!

most gratefully,
Emily Enderby

Dear Memphis Alumni,

Thank you so much for your generous gift! This will help me so much on my college journey. I feel so grateful to have been chosen.

Thank you again!

Leah Massey

Hello,

Thank you SO much for selecting me as a recipient of the Bert and Rose Wright Memorial Scholarship. Thanks to you, I'm able to continue my education and grow one day at a time. I appreciate this more than you know!

-Riley Hulett

5/6/24

Dear Community Foundation Donors,

I am writing this letter to thank you for awarding me with the Fuller Hansen Scholarship. It is an honor to accept this award. I will be putting these funds towards my education at Oakland University. With this education, I will be pursuing a career in business. An all-time dream would be to open my own automotive detailing shop. I have always had a passion for cars as well as deep cleaning things. However, I will be walking in with an open mind. At Oakland, I will be taking part in the Business Honors Program. I hope to use this opportunity to see the options that I have. To save money, I will be staying home and commuting. I wish to avoid as much debt as possible, striving for a future with financial freedom. Scholarships like these are what will be helping me achieve this. Once again, I thank you so much for this honor and help.

Sincerely,

Thomas Awe

Dear Community foundation and Selection Committee for Catherine C. Gellin Scholarship,

Thank you so much for choosing me as a recipient for your scholarship. It will help ease the financial burden of attending Kalamazoo College. I will make every penny worth it. While attending Kalamazoo, I will exemplify small town values. I hope to keep you updated on my travels.

Sincerely, Aida Roub

Increasing focus on skilled trades

April 30, 2024

More students are seeing opportunities to explore careers in skilled trades thanks to an increasing focus throughout St. Clair County by multiple stakeholders.

Last week, despite the cold, more than 1000 students attended the Blue Water Building Trades Career Fair at Goodells County Park. This hands-on experience is a great addition to other local opportunities that allow students to explore future careers, like this past March where almost 5,000 students and their families attended STEM Fest on the campus of SC4.

“There is clearly a growing recognition that we need to help students explore all of their options after high school,” said Randy Maiers, president of the Community Foundation. “These two recent events have proven very popular, and later this fall our region will participate in Manufacturing Day.”



This is the third year for the building trades fair and students explored 38 exhibits of various construction trades, many with hands-on experiences, and had access to more than 100 industry representatives. Some employers were also offering on-the-spot job interviews. Cristine Robson, event chair and youth program coordinator at Macomb/St. Clair Michigan Works!, said 12 students were hired into full-time employment or apprenticeship as a direct result of the event in 2022.

“The event creates equitable access to rural students so that they, too, can benefit from large-scale, hands-on career exploration programming that is not otherwise locally available,” Robson said.

The idea for the event first came about when LiUNA (Laborers’ International Union of North America) approached Michigan Works! about seeing a lack of rural students from the Thumb Region attending career fairs in the metro area.

Robson said the first event had modest attendance, but after the planning committee identified the attendance barriers of transportation and lunch costs participation has grown. This year 12 high schools in St. Clair County and another 10 from Lapeer, Macomb and Sanilac counties came thanks to help from a \$7,575 grant for lunches from the Community Foundation’s Grants Committee and Youth Advisory Council.

In addition to these larger efforts, other local groups such as SONS and the Athletic Factory are also expanding their programs to include more hands-on learning and exposure to the career options in skilled trades.

“The Community Foundation is proud to be able to provide financial support for these programs,” Maiers said.



Come Home Award Recipients



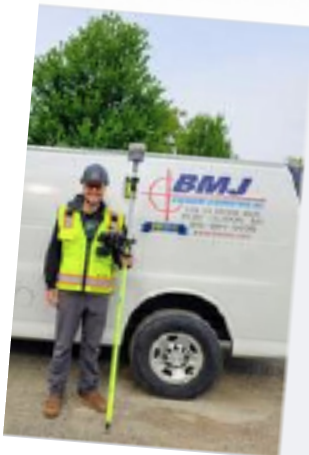
Community Foundation of St. Clair County

Published by Angie Lademer

• May 30 •

Please help us welcome Lance Cameron to the area! Lance is the latest recipient of the "Come Home" talent attraction award. This award is aiding his smooth transition into a new role at BMJ Engineers & Surveyors, providing him with a fresh start and the opportunity to enjoy our community.

Join us in congratulating Lance and make him feel at home in Port Huron!



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Lance Cameron of BMJ gets Come Home Award

Lance Cameron is the latest recipient of a \$3,000 "Come Home" talent attraction award, including \$500 in community perks made [...]



Community Foundation of St. Clair County

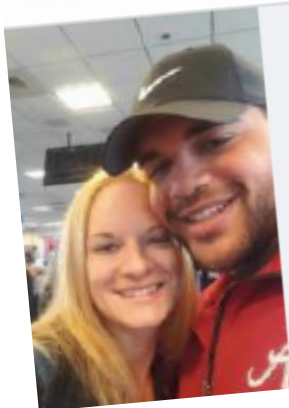
Published by Angie Lademer

• July 18 •

Welcome back home, Kenny Sanders Jr.! After a long journey from Colorado, Kenny and his fiancée are settling into East China, thanks to a \$5,000 Come Home Award from the Community Foundation.

Kenny, born and raised in Port Huron, is excited to bring his experiences back as an HR manager at Biewer Lumber.

The Come Home Award program is bringing young talent back to small-town America. Learn more:



STCLAIRFOUNDATION.ORG

Kenny Sanders Jr. receives \$5,000 Come Home Award

After making the long drive from Colorado, Kenny Sanders Jr. and his fiancée are finally getting settled into their new [...]

Blue Water River Walk celebrates a 10-year milestone



July 11, 2024

By Laura Fitzgerald

For most of the 20th Century the waterfront on the southside of Port Huron, beginning just south of where the Black River meets the St. Clair River, was a hub of industry and railyards which helped feed the economic growth of Port Huron.

In the later part of the century as industry left, changed or faded, the waterfront became a wasteland of scrap yards and abused and neglected industrial remnants.

“I recall that when we first began talking with Jim Acheson and his team at Acheson Ventures, there wasn’t a tree along the waterfront for as far as you could see,” said Randy Maiers, President & CEO of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County. “There was no natural habitat at any point along almost one mile of waterfront and it wasn’t safe for children or families to visit.”

Maiers and the Community Foundation would eventually assume responsibility for implementing the vision of what would become the Blue Water River Walk.

That vision actually began in the late 1990’s when the late philanthropist James C. Acheson began purchasing property along the southside waterfront, just a short distance from where he grew up. By the early 2000’s he had acquired almost 72 acres of property, now known as Desmond Landing.

Acheson’s development company, Acheson Ventures, spent years and millions of dollars clearing, cleaning and rehabbing the property. Mr. Acheson eventually gifted almost the entire shoreline to the Community Foundation in 2011.

“The Foundation promised Mr. Acheson that we would ensure the waterfront’s redevelopment and that in perpetuity, it would be an open, inviting and safe place for children and families to visit,” Maiers added.

Restoration Begins

In 2012 with initial funding from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Foundation began a pilot program on shallow water, shoreline and near-shore habitat restoration. The full-scale multi-year plan then began shortly thereafter, with more than \$2 million in funding from other partners including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

“It was a massive undertaking,” Maiers said. “We had to remove hundreds of tons of debris before we could begin the habitat restoration component.”

Thankfully, the Foundation had the support, collaboration, expertise and partnership of the Friends of the St. Clair River. Sheri Faust is the Executive Director of the Friends group and has been involved in the project since the very beginning.

“There was a lot of care and attention to shoreline vegetation and native vegetation,” Faust said. “We tried to make sure that we kept invasive species out in order to maintain the integrity of the site; it was designed as a fish and wildlife habitat,” Faust said. “We use vegetation that you would have seen if you arrived on the shoreline 300 years ago. The point was to recreate the historical shoreline.”

As the project progressed the Community Foundation secured additional significant private gifts to restore an old ferry dock on the north end of the River Walk, constructed a fishing pier on the south end, and added public art and a walking path.

An additional partnership with St. Clair County Parks & Recreation led to the development of a wetlands park on the very southern end of the River Walk. In the summer of 2014 the community turned out in droves to celebrate the grand opening of the Blue Water River Walk.

The Impact of the River Walk

Today, the daily care and maintenance of the River Walk is performed by the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission, with funding from the Foundation. St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission Director Dennis Delor said a



Before photo of the River Walk County Wetlands Park, looking south.

park naturalist works closely with Friends of the St. Clair River to provide educational programming, remove invasive species in the wetlands, support volunteers, and maintain native plants and the natural environment.

“St. Clair County Parks has a goal of providing access to recreational assets, and with some of the world’s best fresh water bordering our entire eastern face, we have a unique opportunity to develop our parks and trails on those amazing watersheds,” Delor said.

Faust said habitat restoration has led to a resurgence of bird, fish, insect, plant and animal populations. And this rebound in visitors isn’t restricted to wildlife. People of every age, from young children to adults, have flocked to the scenic waterfront to enjoy everything the area has to offer.

During educational programs, children in rain boots and waders can be seen splashing through the wetlands to search for aquatic life, their parents or teachers in tow. Every week, in weather ranging from hot and sunny to frigid and snowy, volunteers wielding trash bags and trash pickers scour the boardwalk, picking up litter. Couples young and old stroll leisurely along the paved path past joggers and bicyclists.

continued on page 20

The River Walk is also an economic driver, bringing residents and tourists into Port Huron and the wider region to visit area businesses. In years past, visitors and residents have flocked to events such as the Port Huron Farmer’s Market or the Friends’ annual Sturgeon Festival. Fundraisers, car shows, and 5Ks have set up shop on the river walk and on the lawn adjacent to the trail.

“It really was an example of if you build it, they will come,” Faust said. “Before the River Walk was even completed, people were already visiting, they were swimming. Wildlife had already moved back in, like birds, reptiles and amphibians to a place that they hadn’t been able to come home to for a really long time. Its become a cleaner and greener destination now. It overall helps our community become a more attractive place to live and work.”

How You Can Support the Future of the River Walk

As the community and the Community Foundation prepare to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the River Walk on September 17th, the Foundation has released its “Wish List’ of future improvements.

“Ten years ago our friends and donors were incredibly generous in support of the Blue Water River Walk,” Maiers said. “Now, we need their help again to make some much-needed improvements.”

The Foundation has cited the following projects for the next phase of River Walk enhancements;

- New universally accessible path leading to the south fishing dock
- Universally accessible enhancements and renovations to the south fishing dock
- Additional lighting on the dock
- Additional light along the entire River Walk
- Finish Phase 2 of the Fishing Pier

The Foundation estimates the total costs for these projects to exceed \$500,000.

“We hope the anniversary event renews excitement and interest in the future of the River Walk,” said Faust. The event will be held at the north end of the River Walk, from 5:30 – 7 p.m. on September 17th. Everyone is welcome to attend!

Anyone interested in donating to support the River Walk can do so by either contacting Jackie Hanton at the Foundation, or donate online to the [Foundation’s River Walk Endowment Fund](#).





You're invited to attend the
**Blue Water River Walk's
10 Year Celebration**

Tuesday, September 17, 2024

Event opens at 5:30 pm, Remarks begin at 6:00 pm

Ferry Dock @ the Blue Water River Walk, 51 Court Street, Port Huron



Enjoy an evening outdoors on the St. Clair River with live music, a bonfire, and catered food set against the backdrop of September's full moon.



6266 Lapeer Road
Clyde, MI 48049
(810) 987-4357



Fax (810) 987-1307
www.bluewaterareahs.org
bluewaterareahs@comcast.net

June 12, 2024

Community Foundation of St. Clair County
500 Water Street
Port Huron, MI 48060-5441

Dear Ms. Audrey Sochor,

We would like to acknowledge and thank you for your very generous donation of \$150.00.

This donation will help us better the lives of homeless animals while they are with us waiting to be adopted. For many animals in our care this is the first time in their lives that they have had enough to eat, a clean place to sleep, and are treated with the love and respect that they deserve. It will also help low-income pet owners afford spay/neuter surgeries for their dogs and cats and spread the word about humane care and animal welfare education.

We are a 501(c)(3) organization, and our tax-exempt number is 381393854

Again, thank you for your generosity and support. Your caring and thoughtfulness continue to touch the hearts of our entire staff and the animals are very grateful.

Sincerely,
Katie Phelan
Katie Phelan, LVT
Director

Greetings!
All of us at Citizens for a Vibrant Community want to thank you for the support you gave Art on the River 2024. Without your support and belief in us, we could not succeed in bring art and music to our community at the level we are able to. Through this event we have helped many people. This year we held a Food drive supporting local Food banks. We also supported the Restoration Christian Community Church youth group. Your generous donations allow us to keep booth fees low for artists and crafters. Plus, the Blue Water Art Association gave kids a chance to work with watercolors. Art on the River is not just another art and music Festival.

Thank you
so much!

Jovana Quedisian
CVC President

Thank you sooooo much for the grant, it means a lot to me and the trip was so amazing and fun and I am so grateful!

Love, Samantha ♡

Thank you so very much the girls had a fantastic time away & they learned many life skills and had fun in a safe space. Christina

Dear Youth Advisory Council,

Thank you for choosing us for the grant. I had a wonderful time it was a great trip. Thank you - Love, Ja'Neah

Thank you so much for choosing us for the grant for our retreat. God bless you.
-Ava

Sue, Jackie, Debbie^{and} Randy,
I really appreciated the "special delivery" chocolates on Valentine's Day! They were delicious!! Thanks for your thoughtfulness...
Kathy

So grateful for all the ways you make a difference.



Thank you for the generous grant and supporting St. Clair TAFJ cheer. We will be using the funds to purchase cheer mats, which will tremendously help our growing program.

-Riley Alley -Amanda Volz

Community Foundation launches Disaster Response Fund



March 18, 2024

Community Foundation of St. Clair County has launched a new Disaster Response Fund to serve any local community that may be impacted by a future disaster in St. Clair County.

“We’ve all seen so many disasters around the country lately,” said Patti Manley, the Board Chair of the Community Foundation. “Here in Michigan we’ve seen floods in Midland, tornados in Gaylord, and tragic mass shootings in other communities. We couldn’t wait any longer to take a proactive approach.”

In preparation for the launch of the new Disaster Response Fund,

the Community Foundation has been holding a series of community discussions about the new Fund and how and when it could be activated. A very generous donation from the James C. Acheson Charitable Foundation has provided the first \$50,000 in funding and the Community Foundation hopes to add another \$50,000 from donors before year-end.

“Our staff has been working on this since early 2023,” said Manley. “And we’ve been in close collaboration with Justin Westmiller, and the St. Clair County Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, since last summer.”

“The timing of this couldn’t be any better,” said Justin Westmiller. “I know I speak for not only our department but our local police and fire departments as well who are all greatly appreciative of this proactive work by our local Community Foundation.”

For transparency and preparation purposes, the Foundation launched a new website www.sccstrong.org that outlines how and when the fund could be used. As structured, it would provide flexible and discretionary funds almost instantly for first responders and local nonprofits who would help a community deal with and recover from a disaster.



Patti Manley, Board Chair

Not only would the Disaster Response Fund be able to provide immediate financial support, but it would also become the primary site for donations from the community and anyone around the world who wanted to help.

Randy Maiers, President & CEO of the Community Foundation adds that this new fund would be under local control and would be able to provide complete transparency about how the funds and donations were used. Community members are encouraged to read through the details of who would make up that local control on the website.

“The key for the public to understand is what constitutes a disaster,” added Maiers. Learning from other foundations around the country, the Community Foundation has defined a disaster as: *an event, natural or man-made or economic, which causes death and/or destruction on a scale that overwhelms the ability of the community’s resources to maintain stability, save lives and preserve property.*

Key to that definition is that it overwhelms the ability of the community’s resources. This means an unfortunate and tragic house fire that affects only one family would not be a disaster that would activate this fund.

Under the terms of the Fund, a disaster may be declared at either the Federal level, State level, or the County level, as initiated by the Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, or by the Foundation itself. A Foundation declared disaster would only come after a request by a local community when their local resources were overwhelmed and they could not maintain stability, save lives and preserve property on their own. These decisions would be made in close consultation with the Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Justin Westmiller. However, a Community Foundation declared disaster carries no legal weight for other governmental entities.

“It’s one of those things we hope to never use,” said Maiers. “But in today’s world, we feel that our Community Foundation, and probably every community foundation in America, should establish their protocols and policies so they are ready and able to respond in an instant.”

**For more information
or to make a gift,
visit our website at
[stclairfoundation.org/
fund/scc-strong/](http://stclairfoundation.org/fund/scc-strong/) and
join us in being St.
Clair County Strong!**



Community Foundation grants top \$2.4 million



July 25, 2024

The Community Foundation has awarded 600 grants and scholarships totaling more than \$2.4 million so far this year.

“It’s been a busy first six months of the year,” said the Foundation Board Chair Patti Manley. “And a large percentage of our funding has been in support of our two focus areas of Community & Economic Prosperity and College, Career and Life Success.”

However, Foundation funding for projects and programs related to Arts & Culture have already topped \$300,000, including a \$10,000 grant to support the NAACP’s Southside Music Festival on Aug. 31.

The Southside Music Festival and Field Day will take place at Lincoln Park in Port Huron. Musical acts will include smooth jazz artist Tom Braxton, GopherBroke Band, guitarist Tony Jefferson and The Shade Band.

“We’ve supported the NAACP in bringing talented musicians into town for the past few years now,” said Tom Walker, chair of the Foundation’s Arts Committee. “The Southside Music Festival also happens alongside Field Day, so it’s a fun-filled day of music, games and raffles for the whole family.”

Support for free community music didn’t stop there. The St. Clair Chamber also received \$20,000 for Rockin’ the Plaza from the St. Clair Endowment Funds Committee. This series brings in bands to play in the St. Clair Plaza courtyard from spring through fall.

“It has brought many people to our community that were then prompted to explore the local restaurants and retailers,” said Bryan Ulatowski, president of the St. Clair Chamber.

The Community Foundation's Grants and Equity & Inclusion committees also celebrated arts and culture by supporting the traditional Pow Wow happening at the Fort Gratiot Light Station on Aug. 17 from 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. with grand entry at noon.

The pow wow will bring indigenous tribe members from all over the state and Canada to celebrate their culture through music and movement. While this event is focused on the respectful appreciation of indigenous culture, pow wow organizers encourage the general public to attend and learn about their culture and participate in dances.

A sampling of other funding includes:

- Support for students to attend PHS Band Camp
- \$10,000 for artwork at the Capac Pocket Park
- \$30,000 for the Blue Water River Walk, which is also celebrating it's 10 year anniversary
- \$10,290 for the Belle River Fishing Pier in Marine City
- \$25,000 for SC4's STEM Fest
- More than \$106,000 for SONS youth programming

The Community Foundation has a wide range of grantmaking funds and committees, and requests for funding are accepted throughout the year. More information on seeking grants can be found here and a full list of 2024 grants can be viewed here.



Thank you so much for your support!
 James B.

Thank you so much for your generosity!
 Mandy

Thank you so much for your support!
 Karriem

Thank you so much for your support!
 Macey

Thank you for your support!
 Malena S

Thank you for your support!
 for you & yours!

Thank you so much for your generosity and support!
 This grant is much appreciated and will contribute to our ongoing programming and care for survivors!
 Rochelle Banner

Thank you so much!
 Bradley

CFYAC



People like you,
 who naturally go
 above and beyond,
 make this world
 a better place for all of us.

Thank You So Much


for helping support & take part in the success of our families & youth. We are already seeing positive impact. Hopefully you can come visit our program our Feature Day in August.

Here are a few social media posts that you might have missed....

 **Community Foundation of St. Clair County**
Published by Angie Lademer
- July 1 -

The Come Home Award has truly been transformational for recipients like Josh Prusik. After receiving the award in 2022, Josh accepted a job with the State of Michigan, and his then-fiancée, Olivia, started working as a veterinarian at a clinic in St. Clair. This support allowed them to relocate from Lansing to St. Clair County.

Thanks to the Foundation's assistance, they managed to pay off all three of Josh's private student loans roughly ten years ahead of schedule. With hi... See more





Community Foundation of St. Clair County
 Published by Angie Lademer

July 29 at 9:10 AM

PHS Endowment Fund is celebrating their most recent grant to both PHS - Port Huron High School and PHS - Port Huron Northern high schools to support college advisors. \$5,000 has been awarded to each high school to continue to support this important position that helps hundreds of students plan their path to success each year. Port Huron Schools love their hometown and we're thankful to the donors who help make grants like this possible each year! Go Hawks, Go Huskies!



July 10 · Memphis

Congratulations to Leah Massey, the 2024 Memphis High School Alumni Association scholarship recipient! Leah will start her journey at St. Clair County Community College with plans to become a first-grade teacher.

Thanks to the continued support of the Memphis High School Alumni Association, we're proud to help students like Leah achieve their dreams. Read more about their story here:



STCLAIRFOUNDATION.ORG

Memphis High School Alumni Association Fund supports future scholars
 The Memphis High School Alumni Association has been committed to helping graduating seni...

