

March 2026

# GENEROSITY IN ACTION



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Community Foundation

of St. Clair County

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On January 13, the Leadership Class traveled to Frankenmuth for a regional competition and a student leadership conference. This experience would not be possible without the generosity of the DuPont Family Endowment. For the 2nd year in a row, our students won with an engaging presentation titled "Red Carpet Mentality."

The following students (and maybe more Leadership Class students) will travel to the state competition and conference in February in Grand Rapids.

Pictured are the presenters:

- Olivia Haken
- Izabella Cook
- Josh Kriesch
- Mia Stade

With Gratitude,

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." - John Wesley



Thank You

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING FIRST ROBOTICS TEAM 6344. YOUR GENEROSITY HELPS OUR STUDENTS LEARN, BUILD, PROBLEM-SOLVE, AND GROW THROUGH HANDS-ON STEM EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPE THEIR FUTURES. WE ARE INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR BELIEF IN OUR TEAM AND OUR COMMUNITY.

YALE JIGGAWATTZ 

# STATE QUALIFIERS

MASC-MAHS STUDENT LEADERSHIP



YHS LEADERSHIP QUALIFIERS WILL BE TAKING THERE STUDENT SHOWCASE PRESENTATION TO THE BIG STAGE AT THE STATE CONFERENCE IN FEBRUARY



PRESENTATION TEAM:

OLIVIA HAKEN - IZABELLA COOK - JOSHUA KRIESCH - MIA STADE



MOCK TRIAL 2026

# THANK YOU

**Kent George DuPont  
Family Heritage Fund**

# Community Foundation and Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation partner to strengthen rural philanthropy through fellowship

The Community Foundation of St. Clair County is strengthening its long-term commitment to rural communities by welcoming Collin Holzberger as its new Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Rural Philanthropy Fellow.

“Having grown up in rural St. Clair County, I know our small towns have a heart you won’t find anywhere else,” said Holzberger. “I’m here to provide the face-to-face support they deserve. Whether that’s a shovel in the ground for a new park or the deep work of defining a community’s future. We’re building growth from the ground up, and I can’t wait to start.”

Holzberger is one of 15 professionals selected nationwide for the 2026–2027 Rural Philanthropy Fellows cohort, which includes 12 Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Fellows and three Herrick Foundation Fellows serving community foundations across Michigan and New York. Each two-year fellowship offers professionals the opportunity to strengthen rural philanthropy while building the capacity of the community foundations they serve.

Supported through grant funding from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and the Herrick Foundation, Fellows work within local community foundations to advance rural-focused efforts that prioritize resident voice, local leadership, and long-term community vitality. In St. Clair County, the fellowship supports the Community Foundation’s strategic focus on rural communities, which represent more than 80 percent of the county’s municipalities.

“We’ve always known our rural communities have a unique spirit and a lot of untapped potential,” said William Oldford, Community Foundation Board Chair. “Having Collin, who was born and raised in the very communities we want to deepen relationships in, allows us to be more present and engaged.”

In his role, Holzberger will support resident-led



initiatives across the county, including efforts connected to Community Heart & Soul, a nationally recognized framework that helps communities identify shared values and turn them into action. He will also assist with placemaking and quality-of-life projects such as public art, trail development, and outdoor recreation initiatives that help small towns remain vibrant and connected.

Beyond direct job experience, Holzberger and the broader Rural Philanthropy Fellows cohort will receive ongoing support from philanthropic practice experts through the New York Funder Alliance, including cohort-based learning opportunities, an individualized professional development budget, and one-on-one networking support to explore long-term career pathways within philanthropy and related fields. Fellows also participate in local and national stakeholder meetings and conferences.

This Fellowship is made possible through the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, a grantmaking organization dedicated to improving quality of life in Southeast Michigan and Western New York. As a spend-down foundation committed to granting its full \$1.2 billion legacy by 2035, the Foundation continues to invest in leadership and infrastructure to ensure lasting impact beyond its lifespan.

# Community Foundation sets grant-making record in 2025

The Community Foundation marked a milestone year in 2025, awarding more than \$6.53 million in grants, the largest total in its history, as investments poured into nonprofit organizations, infrastructure projects and essential community services across the region.

“Grantmaking in 2025 reflected a clear focus on areas where need and opportunity intersected,” said Board Chair Will Oldford. “The largest share of funding supported initiatives tied to Community & Economic Prosperity and Basic Needs & Human Services, reinforcing the Foundation’s commitment to both long-term economic growth and immediate quality-of-life improvements.”

A list of all 2025 grants may be found [here](#). The record-breaking year was fueled by a mix of large-scale fundraising success and targeted, high-impact grants. A major contributor was The Big Give,



the Community Foundation’s 24-hour online giving event that happens every three or four years, which raised more than \$625,000 for 70 local nonprofits, underscoring both donor generosity and the breadth of community need.

Significant infrastructure investments also played a key role in pushing grant totals to new heights. More than \$940,000 was awarded for Phase II of the Bridge to Bay Trail, supporting trail connectors designed to enhance accessibility, recreation and economic vitality. In addition, a \$242,500 grant helped advance the Memphis Lions Community Hub, a project aimed at strengthening neighborhood connections and expanding community-based resources.

The Community Foundation was also there to support basic needs in times of crisis. The disaster response fund SCC Strong, created with the goal of supporting any local community that may be impacted by a disaster and the hope that it would never have to be used, ended up supporting two small-scale



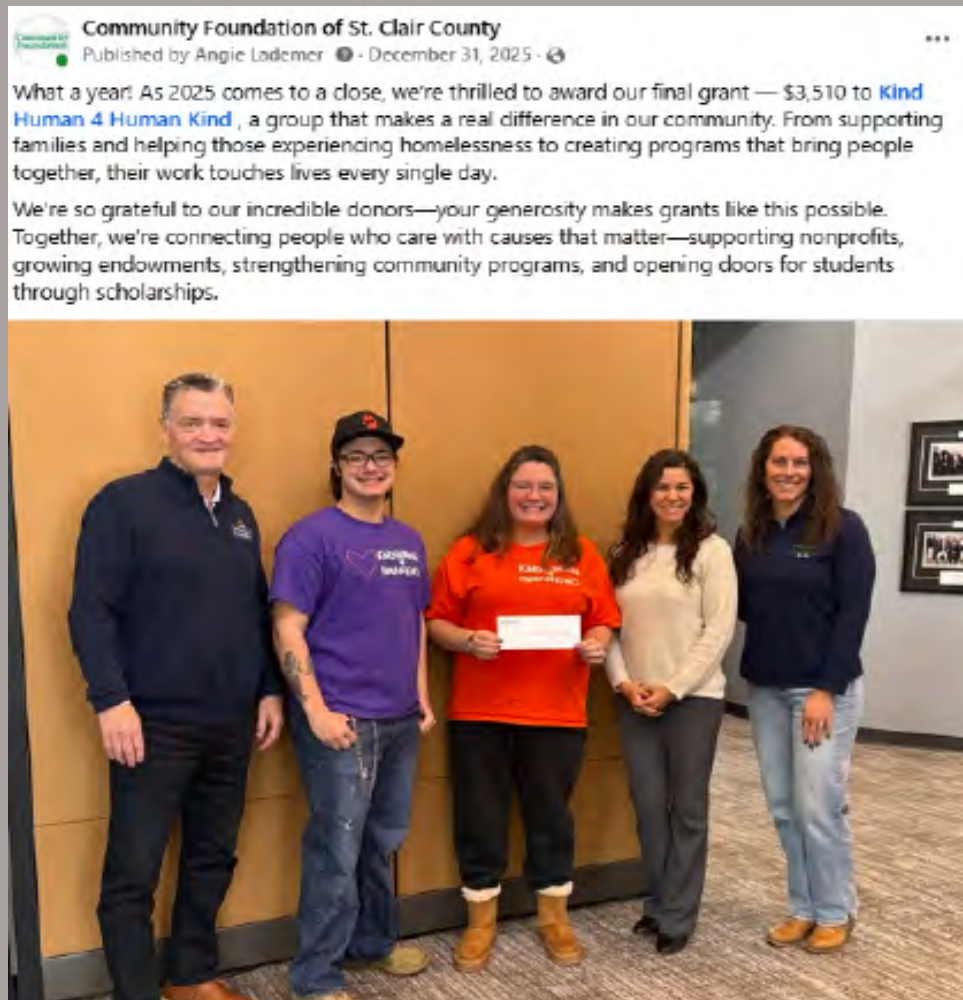
disasters at the request of the St. Clair County director of Homeland Security & Emergency Management – more than \$34,000 was awarded to support individuals impacted by the Bree Road apartment fire in East China and the St. Clair Landings flood in Port Huron.

The newly established Community Assistance Fund also awarded almost \$52,000 to food pantries and programs that supported federal employees and others who needed it during the federal government shutdown.

Oldford said the scale of 2025’s grantmaking demonstrates what’s possible when donors, nonprofits and community partners align around shared priorities. With record-setting investments now on the books, the year stands as a defining chapter in the Foundation’s ongoing mission to build a stronger, more resilient community.



Check out the [giving center](#) to learn more about how you can support the work of the Community Foundation.



Dear Audrey,

I am humbled by your kindness and generosity of the Grant we received. This will make a huge impact in helping our clients. It is our goal to help those in need and give them dignity. Thank you to all involved in this decision making. It's HUGE!!

Marlene Brown  
Christian Service  
Chairperson and  
Food Pantry Chair

Dear Community Foundation,

Thank you so much for your generous \$500<sup>00</sup> donation for our food pantry. You lighten our burden and allowed our clients to have a wonderful holiday.

I pray you and your families have a wonderful 2026.

Thank you and May God Bless you all!

Marlene Brown  
Christian Service Chair  
Holy Family Catholic  
Church Food Pantry  
Memphis, MI  
586-531-3884

Community Foundation  
of St. Clair Co.

Dear Audrey & Team

THANK-YOU so much for the second donation to our food pantry. It helps us so much in supplying meat (protein) ~~to~~ the guests that come every month.

Friends of Faith  
Lutheran Food Pantry  
Bob & Lisa Edmondson



February 4, 2026

Dear Friend, *Community Foundation of St. Clair County,*

Thank you for your generous gift to the Blue Water Area Rescue Mission. Your kindness provides safe shelter, hot showers, nutritious meals and essential care to our homeless neighbors. But more than that, your gift lets each man know that they are loved. On behalf of all the men helped by your kindness, thank you.

Business	Check No.	Amount	Date
Community Foundation and Burman J. Misenar Fund	867	\$1,000.00	1/23/2026

Thank you for remembering your neighbors. May God bless you for your kindness.  
*We are so grateful for your generosity! Because of your partnership, our neighbors in need are experiencing both help and hope, right here at home. Thanks again.*

Sincerely,  
*Demetri Stafford*  
Demetri Stafford  
Executive Director

*Natacha & Jackie*

When I think of all the things you've done, I simply can't just stop with one. Thank you again and again!

*Cole Church family* ♥

Thank you for the generous donation to our food program! Your donation helps continue to make it possible for us to provide food to over 100 students at multiple schools and their siblings! It is because of support and donations like yours that help us and allow for our program to continue to grow! Thank you!  
- Red Hawks Relieve Hunger

# Thumb Art Spark igniting creativity throughout Michigan's Thumb

Public art plays an important role in shaping how people experience their communities. It marks gathering places, sparks conversation, and reflects the identity of the people who live there. Across St. Clair County, murals, sculptures, and riverfront installations have become part of everyday life, enhancing public spaces and creating shared points of pride.

This commitment to creative placemaking continues with a new public art installation planned for the Blue Water River Walk in Spring 2026. Supported by the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, the project builds on years of local investment in public art and connects to the launch of Thumb Art Spark, a new regional initiative designed to expand public art opportunities throughout Michigan's Thumb and culminate in a region-wide public art celebration in 2027.

“By sharing examples of large-scale public art from communities across the country, we hope to expand what feels possible here in our own region,” said Randy Maiers, President of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County. “These projects show how art can transform public spaces, tell community stories, and spark new ideas—encouraging us to imagine bold, meaningful works that reflect who we are and where we’re going.

For years, the Community Foundation has supported public art projects across St. Clair County, recognizing that creative installations strengthen community identity and bring people together. From murals and free-standing sculptures to riverfront installations, these projects have helped transform shared spaces into places of connection.

Marine City has used public art to energize its downtown and walkable areas, while Capac has activated shared spaces through creative installations. In Port Huron, murals and sculptures contribute to the city's cultural landscape, and along the



Photo credit: Sheri McWhirter | “Benny The Beard Fischer”, Germfask, MI | Artist Thomas Dambo

the Blue Water River Walk, art complements the river's natural setting. In St. Clair, public art enhances gathering spaces while reflecting local history.

Building on this local momentum, the six-community foundation's that serve Michigan's Thumb Region are collaborating to launch “Thumb Art Spark.” This new initiative begins with an online hub connecting artists, site hosts, and funders across the Thumb region. Designed to make public art easier to imagine, fund, and install, the platform at [ThumbArtSpark.com](http://ThumbArtSpark.com) helps communities share project ideas, identify potential art sites, connect with experienced artists, and explore sponsorship and funding pathways. The initiative will support public art of all types, including murals and sculptures, while allowing each community to participate at a scale that fits its capacity.

Thumb Art Spark provides a framework for regional collaboration while keeping projects grounded in local leadership. Each participating community maintains its own vision. Jody Parmann, a Port Huron-based artist and Chair of the Blue Water Arts Council at the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, leads the creative direction and coordination

of Thumb Art Spark and serves as the primary point of contact for the initiative.

Launching a public art project requires planning, partnerships, and financial support. Funding is often the biggest hurdle. Some projects may be eligible for grant support through a local community foundation, though funding is not guaranteed. Communities are encouraged to explore multiple funding options—including sponsorships, local fundraising, and donor support—when planning public art projects. Communities interested in public art are encouraged to start locally by connecting with their community foundation. To find your local community foundation, visit the Council on Foundations (COF). Residents and organizations interested in learning more about public art or participating in Thumb Art Spark are encouraged to connect directly with Jody Parmann to ask questions, explore opportunities, and discuss potential next steps.

Public art depends on community investment. Donor support helps bring creative projects to life and strengthen public spaces across the region. To learn more about Thumb Art Spark or how to get involved, reach out to Jody Parmann at [jp@jodyparmann.art](mailto:jp@jodyparmann.art) or [info@thumbartspark.com](mailto:info@thumbartspark.com)



Photo credit: Rick Pepper | Silo Art Project, Mankato, MN | Artist Guido van Helten

 **CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
Port Huron Schools  
200 32<sup>nd</sup> Street • Port Huron, MI 48060  
(810) 984-6533 • Fax (810) 272-4780 • www.phasd.us

February 17, 2026


Dear Community Foundation Youth Advisory Council,

Thank you for your generous grant supporting our Student Council Leadership Conference. Because of your support, 25 of our student leaders will have the opportunity to step outside their comfort zones and view leadership through a much broader lens. The chance to travel, collaborate with other schools, and connect with peers who share similar ideas and passions is an incredibly powerful experience for our Cougars.

It is truly refreshing to see our community invest in our school and student leaders in such a meaningful way. Our Student Council proudly includes 76 student leaders in grades 6–8 who are eager to grow and to serve. Conferences like this help them strengthen essential skills such as public speaking, planning school-wide events, communicating effectively as representatives of their peers, and leading activities that foster a safe and welcoming environment for growth. These are lifelong skills that will positively impact them well beyond middle school.

Your support has made this opportunity possible, and we are deeply grateful. Thank you again for investing in our CMS Student Council and for helping us build a stronger community together.

Sincerely,

  
Joseph S. Kramer  
Principal

  
Rayna Palmer  
Student Council Advisor

We will advocate for you  
inside and outside of school



On behalf of The students at St. Clair High School, Thank you for your generous grant in support of our Peer-to-Peer / Links Program. It provides vital resources that wouldn't be possible otherwise. We are honored by your investment in our students' success.

Sincerely,  
Kusty Nickles

Community Foundation and Kusch Family,  
Our entire Holland Woods Family thanks you for your generous donation of \$600<sup>00</sup> to support our hygiene closet and feminine hygiene program. Your support helps ensure that our students have access to essential items. Thank you again for your support!

Jillian Bertich  
Principal

# From local vision to lasting places: \$600,000 in rural recreation takes shape

By Krystal Moralee

This year, three local communities will see \$600,000 in rural recreation projects come to life — all because of local vision paired with a little support and guidance.

For many small and rural communities, the greatest challenge to improving public recreational spaces isn't a lack of ideas. It's the complexity of securing funding to bring those ideas to life. Yet the growing relationships between rural communities and the Community Foundation are proving those complexities can be overcome.

The Community Foundation didn't want good ideas to sit on a shelf. Instead, they connected Emmett, Grant, and Ira Townships with two experts — grant writer Kim Harmer and recreation specialist Nancy Winzer — who understood exactly how to guide communities through the detailed Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Recreation Passport grant process.

“We know our communities have powerful ideas,” said Kim Harmer, grant writer and consultant for the Community Foundation. “With a little coaching, funding becomes possible to bring those ideas to life.”

That's exactly what happened. Each project grew out of the townships' five-year recreation plans — roadmaps created with input from local residents — and was strengthened through expert guidance and collaboration.

In Grant Township, the DNR awarded a \$100,000 grant toward the development of a new splash pad, matched by \$100,000 in local funding for a total project investment of \$200,000. Designed as a family-friendly gathering place, the splash pad will offer residents a new space to cool off and connect on warm summer days.



*Grant Township*

In Emmett Township, a \$75,000 DNR grant, paired with a \$25,000 local match, will support a \$100,000 project that includes a half multi-use court and an accessible play feature. The project builds on recent park improvements and emphasizes inclusive recreation opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities.

Ira Township received the largest award: a \$150,000 DNR grant toward a \$300,000 project that will feature a green treehouse and a nature trail. The township raised \$125,000 locally and received an additional \$25,000 challenge grant from the Community Foundation — designed to strengthen the local match and increase competitiveness in the DNR application process.

“This would not have been possible without the resources from the Community Foundation Capacity Building program and their knowledgeable consulting team,” shared Cindy Babisz, Ira Township Parks and Recreation Director.

When the Community Foundation talks about its Capacity Building program, it means working side-by-side with rural and small town communities — providing resources, expert support, and connections that help turn local ideas into fundable projects.

Over the past several years, the Community Foundation has partnered with Emmett, Grant, and Ira Townships through this program, alongside consultants Harmer and Winzer, helping each community translate residents' wishes into strong, competitive grant applications.

“This is a model we see real value in continuing. As a funder, one of our roles is to help communities access resources they might not otherwise be able to pursue on their own,” said Natacha Hayden, Program Officer for Community Impact. “Investing in experts who can help our rural and small towns handle the documentation necessary to apply for funding from the state, through things like the DNR passport grants, helps unlock larger sources of support to leverage our grantmaking.”

Construction is expected to begin later this year, with all projects completed by late 2027. These investments build on improvements already visible in the townships — including a new kayak launch in Ira Township, a multi-use court in Grant Township, and a pavilion and trail in Emmett Township.

For the Community Foundation, these wins demonstrate what is possible when local ideas are paired with expert guidance. By helping townships navigate complex grant systems, community dreams become real places where people can gather, play, and connect for years to come.

To support rural communities as they continue to build parks, trails, and gathering spaces, email Natacha Hayden at [natacha@stclairfoundation.org](mailto:natacha@stclairfoundation.org) to learn how you can get involved.



*Ira Township*

# Removing barriers, building futures: how one mother's dream became possible



For years, the dream of becoming a nurse quietly lingered in the background of Cecilia Ward's life—patient and persistent, always waiting for the right moment. This January, that dream finally became reality when she began the nursing program at St. Clair County Community College. But the journey to that first day of class was far from easy.

“What many people don't realize are the significant upfront costs of programs like nursing that aren't typically covered by a traditional scholarship,” explains Jessica Flann, Program Officer for Postsecondary Success. “These expenses can threaten enrollment, closing the door to a future before it even starts.”

Cecilia's journey to get into the nursing program was shaped by late nights, early mornings, and unwavering determination as she powered through four semesters

of prerequisites, intense exam preparation, and constant sacrifice.

She didn't anticipate the financial barriers that arrived all at once. Beyond tuition, there were required access codes, scrubs, clinical shoes, equipment, and supplies—unexpected costs that appeared just as she was trying to find her footing.

Thanks to strong and continued donor support for students like Cecilia, to cover those life needs expenses through the High Priority and Life Needs Fund at the Community Foundation, Cecilia was able to accept her spot in the program prepared, confident, and focused on learning. “For many students, these expenses feel like an impassable wall,” Flann notes. “Life needs support doesn't just ease the burden—it makes participation possible.”

Cecilia overcame barriers that could have ended her journey before it began because the Community Foundation helps students not only access college, but persist through it.

Originally from Lapeer and now raising her family in St. Clair County, Cecilia found balancing college, work, and motherhood a relentless juggling act. During her prerequisites, she worked full-time, attended school full-time, and parented full-time. Now, as a first-semester nursing student, her alarm goes off hours before dawn so she can study in the quiet before her children wake up. Once they do, she shifts seamlessly into “mom mode”—packing lunches, tying shoes, and navigating drop-offs—before heading straight to class. “There is no pause button, no backup plan, and no room for delay,” Cecilia says. “It’s exhausting, but deeply meaningful.”

and dedication meet donor support at just the right moment. “We are so fortunate that our donors believe in our students ability to succeed with a little extra help through their entire college going experience, not just one time support like traditional scholarships,”

shared Jackie Hanton, Vice President at the Community Foundation of St. Clair County.

*“What many people don’t realize are the significant upfront costs of programs like nursing that aren’t typically covered by a traditional scholarship,” explains Jessica Flann, Program Officer for Postsecondary Success. “These expenses can threaten enrollment, closing the door to a future before it even starts.”*

“By investing in students through renewable scholarships and life needs support, donors help remove the barriers that stand between determined students and their degrees. This support doesn’t just fund education—it fuels futures, strengthens families, and ensures that those who want a better life can achieve it.”

If you would like to support the Community Foundation’s Life Needs Fund or explore creating your own scholarship fund, visit [stclairfoundation.org/give](https://stclairfoundation.org/give) or contact Jackie Hanton at [jackie@stclairfoundation.org](mailto:jackie@stclairfoundation.org).





To The Community Foundation and Woman's Initiative,

# Thank you for



making our  
playgroups  
possible!

helping us to  
learn through  
play!

bringing us  
together to  
learn!

helping  
us  
grow!

Oakland

Will

Artie

Edan

With gratitude,

Jen, Riley, RESA, the playgroup facilitators and most of all, our little friends

Myles

Ezra

Jack

Emberly

Kina

Aspen

Hudson

Liam

# Bill and Ann Maas leave a lasting legacy gift for the St. Clair County Library

By Krystal Moralee



Last summer, Port Huron lost the second half of a couple who held the needs of the community close to their hearts. Bill and Ann Maas helped meet the needs of community through action during their lifetimes and then a planned gift through their estate to carry forward their legacy of loving our local library.

Bill and Ann Maas started their journey together in midlife, and long-time friend Sandy Laham said they were soulmates who took their commitment to each other seriously, renewing their promises annually. They brought that same level of dedication to everything in life that they deemed worthy. “They were people who got involved and supported – through work and financially – the things that were important to them,” said Laham.

Bill passed away in 2018 at the age of 89, and Ann followed in August of last year at 85 years old. But while their ability to give their time came to an end, the Maases planned ahead and trusted the Community Foundation to steward a legacy gift in their name to the St. Clair County Library Fund, to ensure their commitment to the library was carried on beyond their lives.

As educators, Bill and Ann Maas understood that accessibility is a key component in having a strong community, opening the doors to literacy and educational and recreational materials and activities, regardless of one’s economic situation. For them, all of that and more was available through the local library. They knew the library offers much more than books, including internet access, a law library,

historical reference materials, a maker's space, and a refreshed bookmobile service to take materials to areas in our county that don't have a library branch.

St. Clair County Library Director Allison Arnold remembers Bill as a "quietly dignified gentleman" who had a love for the arts, and she knew Ann a bit better, as the library was very dear to her.

Ann was also a dedicated patron of the library, coming in every week to get books and spend time chatting with everyone.

"She had a lot of friends here," said Arnold. The couple, she said, were always supportive and saw the value of having a public library system.

When someone leaves a legacy gift like Ann and Bill Maas did, said Arnold, it sends an important message that they really believed in the cause they are supporting.

"It shows the donor trusts the organization will use these monies to the betterment of the organization and that they will do good," she said. "It's just a show of support that says, 'this is what's important to us.'"

The Maases moved from Mt. Clemens to Port Huron in the late 1980s. Both retired from long careers in education – Bill taught biology at Bellevue High School and Fordson High School in Dearborn, and Ann spent many years in the Macomb Intermediate School District, teaching young adults with significant disabilities and behavioral challenges and ending her career as the vocational evaluator for students with disabilities.

After retirement, Bill and Ann took the passion they poured into their careers and pivoted their efforts toward volunteering and contributing to the community. Bill was a volunteer at Port Huron Hospital for more than 16 years, also volunteering at the Huron Lightship and the Municipal Office Center. Ann was an active member of the Friends of the St. Clair Library and ran two successful countywide millage campaigns for the library. She was also an avid supporter of the International Symphony, first on their auxiliary and then on their board, and was active

with the League of Women's Voters, the American Association of University Women, and several book clubs. She was also a popular community columnist for the Port Huron Times Herald for several years.

Arnold said having the support of citizens like the Maases gives the library staff a boost because working with the public can at times be a thankless job. This, she said, shows staff that there are people who believe in the good they're trying to do on a daily basis.

When individuals or couples like the Maases make a charitable bequest in their Will or Trust, or name the Community Foundation or a fund at the Foundation as a beneficiary of an IRA or life insurance policy, they ensure the causes they care about continue to thrive for generations. Through this thoughtful planning, the Maases' lifelong commitment to learning, civic engagement, and community enrichment will live on well beyond their lifetimes.

The Maases were part of the [Community Foundation's Legacy Society](#) which honors donors who choose to make a lasting impact through their estate plans. Their generosity reflects a deep belief in the power of community and a desire to give back in meaningful, enduring ways. The Foundation is grateful for the Maases' foresight and for the example they set for others who wish to leave a legacy rooted in purpose.

If you would like to make a gift or talk to someone about setting up a legacy gift of your own, visit the Giving Center on the Community Foundation website or talk with Jackie Hanton at 810-984-4761.

# THANK YOU

This is such an amazing opportunity and I'm so honored and blessed to have been picked for this scholarship! Your generosity will go a long way to help further my college education. I am so beyond thankful to have been awarded with this and I hope we can meet soon so I can express my gratitude.

Lauren  
Memphis High School Alumni Scholarship

This is the second time I have received this scholarship and it has truly made my schooling so much better. It allowed me the opportunity to take the first half of the fall semester and get acclimated to the new climate, instead of instantly searching for work opportunities. This in turn helped me immensely as I was able to find a job within my career path with the connections I made in the first quarter. I just want to take this time to thank the Wilhelm family for their continued support. Last event was incredible and I look forward to repeating it this summer.

Nyles  
James Wilhelm Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship means very much to me for a variety of reasons. One of them being that, coming from a typical working class family, the ability to finance my education relies primarily on me and the cost of college these days can be overwhelming to a student recently graduated from high school. I have worked part time jobs to help out but nothing close to anything that could pay for my college expenses. This scholarship will make such a significant impact in helping me pay for all my courses and housing and will help relieve a huge burden from me during this already stressful time. I am very grateful to be given the opportunity to receive this scholarship and will utilize the funds wisely during my time in college this year.

Brookelynn  
Fuller Hansen Educational Trust

I am truly grateful for your generosity in making this scholarship possible. Your support has eased the financial burden of my education and allows me to focus more fully on my studies and future goals instead of focusing on the stress of how I will afford my future. This opportunity not only motivates me to work harder, but also reminds me of the importance of giving back and helping others. Thank you for believing in students like me and investing in our futures.

Gratefully, Panayia :)  
John F. & Rose Marie Wismer Scholarship

# Life Needs Assistance goes beyond tuition to help students succeed

By Krystal Moralee

The costs of post-secondary education extend far beyond tuition, and even when scholarships and financial aid cover classes, additional expenses can sometimes determine whether a student completes the semester or quietly steps away with their goal unrealized.

The Community Foundation's Life Needs Assistance program is designed to help remove those obstacles. The program provided \$50,950 in grants in 2025 to help local students address tuition and non-tuition barriers that threaten their ability to stay enrolled.

"If we want students to reach degree or certification completion, we have to support them beyond tuition, fees, and books," said Jessica Flann, the Foundation's Program Officer for Post-Secondary Success. "When



*Joslyn Williams*

students know they won't have to struggle alone, they can focus on learning, not surviving. Supporting their basic needs helps keep them on their educational path and strengthens our community

with a more prepared workforce."

Textbooks, lab supplies, and required online access codes can cost hundreds of dollars per semester, and students need them immediately. Technology is equally essential a reliable



*Nyles Hughes*

laptop, stable internet access, and specialized software are often required to complete coursework, and if equipment fails, the result can be catastrophic.

Transportation costs add up as well, particularly in a largely rural region like St. Clair County. Gas, vehicle repairs, parking fees, or long commutes can become barriers to attendance. For many students, especially adult learners, the challenge is compounded by ongoing living expenses such as rent, utilities, groceries, childcare, and healthcare. Many also have to work less or leave jobs to attend classes, labs, or internships, resulting in lost income at the very moment expenses increase. It doesn't take a streak of bad luck, either. For some students, one unexpected expense can make continuing with their education impossible.

Nyles Hughes of Yale has seen how quickly those gaps can appear. Currently studying Criminal Justice and Psychology at Michigan State University, Hughes has received assistance from the Foundation that allowed



*Isaiah Lopez*

him to keep moving toward his goal.

“The Community Foundation has helped me more than I could have imagined,” Hughes said. “A renewing scholarship has kept college affordable and helped me avoid financial strain. When I hit a deer and had transportation issues, a Life Needs grant helped cover much of the repair cost so I could stay afloat.”

Isaiah Lopez of Port Huron described similar support.

“The Life Needs Assistance program truly changed my life,” he said. “Growing up in a five-person household with one working parent, college didn’t seem possible. The Foundation helped me navigate college and finances and even provided a computer and backpack so I could keep moving forward.”

For Joslyn Williams, the program’s impact came during a particularly demanding time in her education.

“The Community Foundation’s support was invaluable during my student teaching semester,” Williams said. “Through the Life Needs Assistance program, they helped reduce stress and strengthen my confidence during a very busy semester. Knowing that this foundation believes in my potential and supports me through my journey inspires me to grow both personally and professionally.”

These local stories illustrate how modest gaps can have critical consequences. Philanthropic support fills that gap. The Foundation’s Life Needs Assistance fund is designed to be flexible and responsive, providing timely help that traditional financial aid cannot. Donors who contribute to this effort recognize that access to college is only the first step. Completion is the goal.

When students earn certificates or degrees, the return extends far beyond the individual. Families gain greater financial stability, employers benefit from a more skilled workforce, and communities grow stronger overall when more residents have the opportunity to finish what they started.

Community members who want to ensure local students can continue their education – even when unexpected obstacles arise – can help by supporting the Life Needs Assistance fund by contacting Jessica Flann at [jessica@stclairfoundation.org](mailto:jessica@stclairfoundation.org), and students who could use a hand can find an application here: <https://stclairfoundation.org/scholarships/>

# Community Foundation

of St. Clair County



**GENEROSITY LIVES HERE.  
IN EVERY STORY, EVERY GIFT, EVERY ACT OF CARE.  
THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF IT.**