

Community Foundation invests in future of Rock County

These are difficult times for many people in our community. Unemployment remains high, paychecks don't go very far, and every day it seems another public service is being curtailed in the interest of budget cuts.

That's why the kinds of innovative investments being made by philanthropy—particularly community foundations—have never been more important.

This week, Wisconsin residents recognize the vital role of more than 700 community foundations nationwide in supporting essential services such as health care clinics, food banks, domestic violence shelters, libraries and volunteer fire departments. In 2010, these foundations granted an estimated \$4 billion to a variety of nonprofit activities in the arts, education, health and human services, the environment and disaster relief. Though they could never replace the role of government-funded services, community foundations can help nonprofit organizations and others by using their private resources for the public good.

Community foundations' financial independence allows them to take risks, sometimes achieving extraordinary results and affecting change. Another advantage of community foundations' philanthropy is their

ability to drive innovation as an incubator for great ideas. While government has the resources to accomplish big things, it is not known for being nimble or innovative. This is where community foundations can really make a difference, developing timely solutions to pressing problems in our society.

During the past year, the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin was able to make grants to local food pantries in support of the Farmers Market Food Coupon Program. The program benefited low-income food pantry clients by providing them with fresh and nutritious food. But its added value is that it also benefited local farmers market vendors. Nearly 2,200 coupons were claimed, resulting in an estimated economic impact of nearly \$11,000 on the Janesville and Milton markets.

Community foundations know that the investments they make today will help people for many years to come. By marshaling the financial resources of individuals, families and businesses, we can address problems such as unemployment, stagnant economic growth, hunger and poverty. By strategically working with others, community foundations can equip society to more effectively deal with such future challenges in Rock County.

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