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JANUARY 2020



Jennifer Giovannitti

Claude Worthington
Benedum Foundation

Jennifer Giovannitti is President of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. She previously served as a Community Development Manager for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond and is the former Chief Executive of the Randolph County Economic Development Authority. In 2012, Giovannitti formed the West Virginia Loan Fund Collaborative to determine the impact of small business lending in underserved communities.

The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

Celebrating 75 Years of Philanthropy

In December of 1944, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation was established by Michael Benedum, guided by his desire to give back to his home state of West Virginia and his overarching belief that wealth is not measured in terms of money, but rather in one's treatment of others. Michael Benedum retained a deep gratitude for all that he had, despite enduring the unbearable loss of his only child, Claude. The Benedum Foundation has distributed more than \$500 million in grants since inception in the areas of health, education, community development, economic development and the arts. Most of this money has been spent in West Virginia.

As President of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, I am reminded that Michael Benedum was bold in business and in philanthropy. He took risks in business as he explored for oil and gas around the world and, while leading the foundation from 1944 to 1959, he showed his resolve in philanthropy for helping the most vulnerable on issues surrounding war, immigration, poverty, race and social justice. True to Michael Benedum's spirit of being bold and courageous, the past grantmaking of the Foundation provides a dynamic portfolio of the immense energy among grantees to contribute ideas and strategies to some of our toughest problems.

The beauty of the Benedum model is that we have aspired to partner with all sorts of grantees, which has played out in diverse ways. We have seen large, multiplayer projects completed, like the Clay Center in Charleston and the

Benedum Center in Pittsburgh, both adding educational opportunities and unique experiences for kids and adults. We have witnessed important policy moves, like the adoption of Universal Pre-K in West Virginia to give every child a strong educational start.

In addition to the big projects, we have also sought forward-thinking and perhaps less traditional projects that seek to build community resilience and entrepreneurial courage. These grants do not always get significant recognition, but they are equally important. This is exemplified by Benedum standing with grantees during natural disasters, encouraging the next generation of leaders, and by supporting regional initiatives such as grassroots programs that support local self-employment through cooperatives of beekeepers, maple syrup growers and ginseng programs. In other instances, we have joined highly technical partners on serious health initiatives, like those that focus on chronic disease, substance use disorder and oral health.

We have learned a lot in our 75 years of grant-making about being a modest, stable partner to the people we serve. At its core, the Benedum Foundation takes on the agenda that is identified from within communities. The work of grantees is what we seek to elevate. Through these 75 years, our experience has

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shown us that the big societal issues are best tackled through multi-organizational partnerships, and yet they are often the issues within health, education and community that we all have a significant stake in.

Benedum will be announcing strategic work in 2020 that will aspire to affect these issues, because we want a future that is brighter for kids, healthier for adults and more stable economically for all. For example, investing in educational strategies so that more of West Virginia's kids hit the mark of important milestones is a big initiative that matters to all of us. Combatting chronic disease and childhood obesity so citizens are healthy, productive and spending less of their income on medical bills matters to all of us. Investing in our downtowns and small businesses that support local economies matters to all of us.

“While I am conscious that my love for the land that gave me birth has been an influence in guiding the disposition of my estate, there are other practical reasons why I have favored my native state of West Virginia.”

MICHAEL BENEDUM

In 2020, the Benedum Foundation plans to leverage the best of what philanthropy has to offer to work on projects that seek long-term outcomes – projects that are ripe for larger collaborative strategies. Philanthropy is well suited to be patient and to take some risks. We can give more than money. We can convene the exceptional thinkers we work with every day, contribute our foundation leadership and add a healthy dose of hope to the mix. We need as many partners as we can manage. A bright vision for the future in philanthropy would include adding more foundations to West Virginia because we need additional foundations working to give more patient capital, more support for risk takers and more support for organizations working for good.


Those of us that have been fortunate enough to be born in West Virginia, to live in West Virginia, to marry a West Virginian, or to spend our precious free time vacationing in West Virginia, know that the state is full of beauty, promise and extraordinary people. The Benedum Foundation will continue to pour our passion into the mission that Michael Benedum set forth so that we can give back to West Virginia and advance the important work that remains. 



Photo Caption An historical photo of Michael Benedum.