



# VIEW*S*&VISIONS

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## Fast Forward: Leading with Our Hearts

Judy Sjostedt, Executive Director  
Our Community's Foundation

Judy Sjostedt is executive director of the Parkersburg Area Community Foundation (PACF) and its regional affiliates, collectively known as "Our Community's Foundation." Since 1999, she has led the organization through a period of rapid growth. PACF was honored in 2009 as one of eight recipients nationwide of an Effie™ award for effective, inclusive practices. PACF was recently re-accredited as a Nationally Certified Community Foundation, a hallmark of excellence in philanthropic practice.

Re-elected in 2011 to the National Council on Foundations Community Foundations Leadership Team, Ms. Sjostedt is a faculty member of the Center for Community Foundations Excellence and recently served the Aspen Institute as a resource team member. She belongs to the National Advancement Officers Network Steering Team and the CF Insights Advisory Board.

Ms. Sjostedt serves on the boards of directors of Highmark WV Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Vision Shared. She chaired the West Virginia Grantmakers Board during its formative years and received its 2010 Spirit of Philanthropy-Staff Leadership award. Her career has spanned all economic sectors with prior positions in the nonprofit sector, chemical industry and federal government. An Assumption College graduate, she holds a master's degree in public administration from West Virginia University.

It's a new year and with it comes fresh resolve to move past old patterns that hold us back; to encourage ourselves to rise above focusing on county boundaries and fretting about what we lack in resources. For too many years in too many places, communities have operated from a "scarcity mentality." Historically, much effort is directed toward county-level improvements. Yet county lines are, after all, man-made boundaries within which pride, centered on defining who we are, can wind up constraining what we might become. When we release that focus on our own needs and accept that our next door neighbors' needs are much the same, our capacity to make a difference around our common concerns grows exponentially.

Philanthropy is a means by which we can bring our communities together. Giving is more than just a generous act; it is a hopeful act that leads with the heart. Giving is done by people who feel their communities deserve promising futures,



and who believe that, through their gifts, they can make a positive impact. To be part of Our Community's Foundation means to be someone who embraces a big vision for our region's good.

Our Community's Foundation is the collective identity of the Parkersburg Area Community Foundation (PACF) and its regional affiliate organizations in Doddridge, Jackson, the Little Kanawha Area, Mason and Ritchie Counties. Together, we serve 11 counties in West Virginia and Ohio.



*Individuals from around the region, representing the whole of Our Community's Foundation*

Photo Credit: Osborne Photographic



*Left: Stained glass artist, Martina Huson, is working with Ripley High School students through the Foundation's Arts-in-Education initiative  
Right: Through a project funded through the Foundation, local school children planted, cultivated and grew their own produce for school consumption*



Last year, 1,857 people joined their hands to the work of Our Community's Foundation with their giving. Another 250 served as volunteers on the board of directors, county-level advisory boards, and grants, scholarships, marketing, development and investments committees. Our regional alliance brings scale and attention to our 11 counties and leverages local resources for the common good.

It is only when communities of our size work together that we attract the support of partners at the state, regional and national levels.

Yes, with this many parts in perpetual motion, the work can sometimes be difficult to navigate. Multi-county alliances are inherently fragile, since each county must put its neighbors' interests equal to its own, avoiding the natural temptation to shift in the direction of self-interest when local interests diverge.

From the donor perspective, however, such alliances make good sense. Our regional scale means that we operate very efficiently. Our administrative cost (as a percent of assets) was 1.24 percent last year. Delivering more resources directly for charitable good is something our supporters appreciate. And, while we're

about to bump over \$30 million, asset-wise, even more significant is what that growth generates. A decade ago – with assets one fourth as much – total annual grant making was \$350,000; a sum which didn't spread far. Now, despite periods of recession suppressing earnings, we'll break \$2 million in grants soon. That is exponential benefit, and that is what is possible when people put each other first and work for the common good: they can achieve numbers worth bragging about.

Each county-level affiliate is thriving. Our Jackson County affiliate had a phenomenal year. Its Charity Challenge is likely the largest fundraiser of its kind in West Virginia, raising \$141,000, involving 575 runners and walkers and 20 nonprofits. Our Mason County group held its first "Spirit of Philanthropy" event in partnership with the *Point Pleasant Register* and just benefitted from the transition of a \$2.2 million private foundation. Doddridge County's affiliate received a new scholarship commemorating the life of a beloved educator. Two new "Legacy Society" planned gift commitments were made to benefit the Little Kanawha Area affiliate. In Ritchie County, a large fund opened to support the Harrisville Town Park. And our parent entity, PACF, is crafting an innovative "Civic Leaders

Fellowship Program." This novel public-private partnership will reach out to our region's next generation of promising students to provide an intensive civic and business leadership experience, aimed at retaining our educated young people.

We recently completed a year-long process of researching needs, listening to our area's citizens and crafting a strategic plan to focus our next three years' work.

We have three simple but powerful goals:

- To inspire philanthropy that encourages people to make a difference;
- To engage citizens and bring our region together for action on critical issues; and most importantly,
- To deliver results that matter to local people.

We know the power to transform our communities rests in our own hands, so we're not "Waiting on the World to Change" here. We're moving fast forward to change it for ourselves and for our neighbors. We're truly stronger when we work together. If you're ready to do so – please join us! ♾