Our mission: to strengthen communities and inspire giving.

The Community Foundation is forging partnerships and investing in initiatives that support access to child care for families in the Dubuque region.

Join us for this annual celebration at 7 a.m. Monday, January 20 at the Grand River Center. This year’s keynote theme will be ‘A Current Multi-Cultural Reality Envisioned By Dr. King.’ Visit dbqfoundation.org/events to reserve your seat.

A COMMUNITY THAT CARES

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High-quality child care is important: 90 percent of a child’s brain develops in the first five years of life, and studies show that children who have quality care prior to kindergarten have improved school readiness skills and are more likely to graduate from high school and succeed later in life. That’s one reason the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque is working to remove barriers local families face when it comes to child care.

In 2016, the Community Foundation conducted an assessment to understand what challenges were preventing people from accessing opportunities that would help them thrive. A key finding was that parents struggle to find affordable, quality care for their children, a barrier that prevents them from holding jobs.

With the understanding that child care is a critical piece of infrastructure that drives economic growth, the Community Foundation hosted a summit in 2018 that brought together leaders invested in improving access, affordability and quality. As a result, new partnerships have formed that are helping address this need for Dubuque families.

The Community Foundation received a grant from the Morgridge Foundation to support one solution developed through a partnership between Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) and Greater Dubuque Development Corp. (GDDC).

A pilot program offers free child care to students in a variety of certificate training programs through Opportunity Dubuque, a nationally recognized job training effort that allows individuals to complete industry-driven certifications to upgrade their skills, launch their careers and fill high-demand positions. One program that is part of the pilot is a new child care certificate offered at NICC.

After students earn their certificate, the pilot program then funds their child care needs through their first year of employment. Long-term, organizers hope the program increases the number of qualified providers to help parents find high quality care.

Furthering the partnership with NICC and GDDC, the Community Foundation received a $50,000 Iowa Workforce Development grant to expand the child care pilot.

“The major benefits of this funding are two-fold: We are increasing the capacity of licensed care in the Dubuque area, and we’re removing a significant barrier for individuals who want to train for high-demand careers, yet cannot secure affordable child care services as they learn and train,” said Wendy Mihm-Herold, NICC’s vice president of business and community solutions. “There is no other community organization and higher education partnership offering this assistance program in Iowa right now.”

Care is now being provided to students’ children thanks to a partnership with the Marita Theisen Childcare Center at Steeple Square, which opened in August. “The needs assessment by the Community Foundation and United Way gave us confidence that providing a child care solution was meeting a critical need, and one of the more important things we could do to improve life in the neighborhood and for downtown businesses,” said Judy Wolf, Steeple Square director.

Many families who utilize the center live near enough to walk there, eliminating transportation as a barrier to quality care for their children. Financial barriers have also been lowered. “We had originally budgeted to serve 30% low income families, which is higher than average,” Wolf explained. “However, we made the decision not to turn anyone away, and we’re currently serving just over 60% low income families.”
Support for the new center came in the form of a gift from Jim and Marita Theisen, who used their family funds at the Community Foundation to provide much of the funding to open the facility.

“We’ve relied on many generous donors to be in a position to launch the center, but none more instrumental than the Theisen family. We’re proud to be able to name the center for Marita and have their family so actively involved. There’s not a more wonderful example of selfless giving in the community than Jim and Marita Theisen,” said Wolf.

On the cover: Angela Schrodt, director of the Marita Theisen Childcare Center, picks up her daughter, Prynne, who attends the center.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

When it comes to supporting the next generation of Dubuque residents, founding Board Member John O’Connor looks to his past for inspiration.

“The first time I saw generosity in action, I didn’t know that I’d seen it,” says John O’Connor, Dubuque resident, business owner and co-founder of the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque.

“It was in 1959, when the Wahlert Foundation made a gift to establish Wahlert High School. They created this foundation to put money aside today to take care of the needs of the future. That’s stuck with me, and it’s one of the things that motivated me to get involved in the formation of a community foundation for Dubuque.”

Today, O’Connor’s passion for community and memories of that example of generosity drive him to give back, helping Greater Dubuque grow stronger for future generations.

“People here take care of each other. Everyone works together without a sense of authorship to accomplish things,” he explains. “It’s great to be in a community where there’s a vision for the future, and there’s a work ethic to get it done.”

O’Connor remembers his father, who was involved with Dubuque’s colleges, impressing upon him the importance of endowments for education. So when O’Connor joined the effort to start a community foundation in the early 2000s, he applied that same theory to an entire region.

He describes an endowment like a community’s savings account. As the principal grows, the earnings increase and can be used to meet future needs.

That’s why he chose to make his own gift to the Greater Dubuque Forever Fund, an endowment to address a range of community challenges and opportunities as they emerge. “The needs of our charitable organizations in Dubuque accelerate every year – so those of us who want to give to benefit a specific area can do so. But we should also think about leaving money to the Forever Fund for needs that are yet to come.”

As a former board member, O’Connor is confident current and future Community Foundation leaders will steward the Forever Fund expertly so it has a lasting impact on the people of the community he loves.

“We have a very strong board. We have a committee that decides who receives grants each year. We have a group of strong investment representatives who look after our investments. When I pass away, there’s no better place for the money I want to leave for this community than in their hands — so it does last forever.”

Help address child care and other needs in the Dubuque region

The Community Foundation offers many opportunities to support work that addresses complex community challenges, including child care access and affordability. Gifts to the Greater Dubuque Forever Fund are one way to help tackle critical needs and strengthen the region for the future.

Though no one can predict what needs will arise in coming years, the Community Foundation is equipped to act — working to forge strategic partnerships and ensure everyone can thrive by bringing resources like quality child care within reach. These data-informed collaborations occur at the intersection of our region’s civic, business, education and philanthropic sectors, putting the Foundation in a position to address our community’s most complex challenges.

Your gift to the Greater Dubuque Forever Fund can help the Foundation address a range of emerging needs and provide opportunities to strengthen our region for the future.

To support the Greater Dubuque Forever Fund, contact Faye Finnegan:
faye@dbqfoundation.org 563.588.2700

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Our Model for Transformational Impact
A message from President and CEO Nancy Van Milligen

This fall, Community Foundation Board Member Nancy Dunkel and I had an incredible opportunity to travel to the Rockefeller Brothers Estate in Tarrytown, New York, to meet with leaders of some of the most prominent foundations in the country.

These 16 foundations came together as part of the D5 Coalition to share ideas about advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in philanthropy to reflect the many different experiences of the people in the communities we serve and have a deeper impact.

We and our peers from the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo represented the only two community foundations at the summit, and we had an opportunity to build relationships with other national organizations, including the Ford Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Nancy and I returned home with a renewed commitment to supporting a welcoming culture across our region.

Our presence at the summit speaks to the success that we are having in building communities where everyone can access opportunities that help them thrive. Our model for transformational impact is making potential funders who want to have an impact in America’s heartland take notice.

The relationships made in Tarrytown build on the impactful work we are doing thanks to many levels of support — from individual, local donors to national organizations, such as the Walmart and Morgridge Foundations.

In the past year alone, we have received nearly $2.4 million in grants from national and private foundations to address some of Greater Dubuque’s most pressing challenges like child care, disaster resiliency and building welcoming, inclusive workplaces.

By establishing relationships in Dubuque and beyond, we are bridging people’s generosity with the needs of our region to ensure that everyone who lives here can reap the benefits of a strong, thriving community.

If you would like to support the future of the Dubuque region, please contact Faye Finnegan, director of donor relations, at 563-588-2700 or faye@dbqfoundation.org.