



**BERRIEN**  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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# Berrien County Gives Back

## NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025

**INSIDE: Grant affords fire department to replace rescue tools**



## Garden fund sprouts from nurtured friendship

It was a friendship that blossomed into something wonderful.

When Judy Jones and Nicole Moon met, they became fast friends. Both were artists and had the vision to make the world a more beautiful place. One of their many accomplishments together was building and caring for the Benton Harbor Arts District Garden.

Judy and Nicole both died last year, barely three months apart, after battles with cancer. The legacy of the Benton Harbor Arts District Garden will live on through the **Judy Jones & Nicole Moon Arts District Garden Support Fund** at **Berrien Community Foundation**.

The fund was created by Judy's sons Aaron, Sam and Ben Jones, and is supported by friends and family of the dynamic duo who want to honor them and keep the garden going and growing. The fund will help purchase the supplies needed to care for the garden, which is located across the street from the old Turner Building (now Ben's Pretzels and apartments) and make sure it's thriving and beautiful.

It just makes sense that the lasting tribute to Judy and Nicole be in the Benton Harbor Arts District. They spent 15 years working in the garden to turn the old parking area into the beautiful space that passersby enjoy today. Judy was also instrumental in the launch of the Benton Harbor Arts District, envisioning a city being enhanced by the arts. Nicole was an



*Nicole Moon and Judy Jones work on a chalk art mural.*

accomplished artist and an avid nature lover. The garden is a work of art that they created together.

"My mom and Nicole were best friends," Aaron said. "They did everything together. I think this garden just embodies their friendship and the love they had for each other and for the community."

The goal is to grow the fund into an endowment that will provide for the care of the garden in perpetuity. Members of the Benton Harbor Arts Association, friends and neighbors will continue to be an integral part of maintaining the garden with the same volunteer spirit and determination that Nicole and Judy exemplified.

For more information about the fund or to donate, visit [www.berriencommunity.org/BHArtsGarden](http://www.berriencommunity.org/BHArtsGarden) or call Berrien Community Foundation at (269) 983-3304.

# Scholarship Raises Curtain On Higher Ed Pursuit

When Ella Harris thinks of **Berrien Community Foundation scholarships**, she thinks of hope.

"I'm so happy that, along with the scholarship I received, so many other people in Berrien County got to receive scholarships to help them in their education," said Harris. "These scholarships give people **hope.**"

Harris, a musical theater major at Lake Michigan College, received the **David A. Hicks Scholarship for the Arts** from Berrien Community Foundation in 2024.

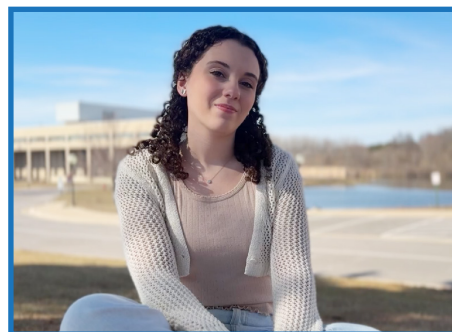
"Being able to come to college and not really have to worry about how I'm going to pay for my books or tuition is definitely helpful," she said.

Harris juggles many responsibilities as a full-time student and part-time employee while also being involved in the college's music and theater departments and performing in multiple shows a year.

"It's always been a dream of mine to go further in my education," Harris added. "This is the first step."

The scholarship Harris received was established by the family of David Hicks, a Lakeshore student who passed from cancer. David often spoke of pursuing a college degree in an art-related field because of the joy he found in animation, comics, superheroes, theater and video games, his family said.

"When we award this scholarship to deserving students like Ella who want to show the world their creativity, it feels like David's legacy is living on," said Zack East, David's brother. "It's as if his passion for the arts is now in the spirit of others ready to show the world their talents. We as a family couldn't be more proud of helping these students in David's



BCF scholar Ella Harris studies musical theater at Lake Michigan College, where she recently held a lead role in "School of Rock: The Musical."

name every year."

The David A. Hicks Scholarship is one of more than 50 scholarship funds held by BCF.

"We are proud to be a leading organization donors can turn to for fulfilling their charitable plans," said BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey. "Our donors make college more attainable for students while lifting up loved ones, organizations, fields of study and so much more."

In 2024, the Foundation awarded \$533,000 to 91 students. This means, collectively, they did not have to assume more than a half-million dollars in loans.

Berrien Community Foundation will celebrate the next cohort of scholars and their donors June 17 at its annual Scholarship Celebration.

To learn more about how to start a scholarship, contact Lisa Cripps-Downey at (269) 983-3304 or [lisa@berriencommunity.org](mailto:lisa@berriencommunity.org).

**We're sharing our stories on YouTube!**

Watch Ella in her element

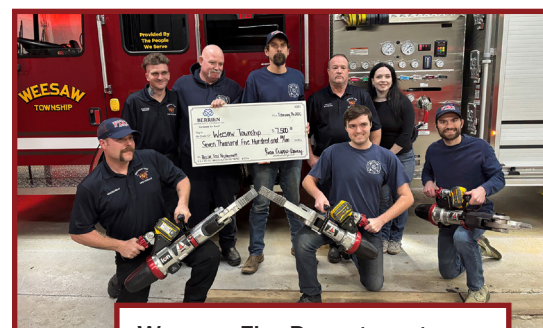


## Grant funds life-saving tools for Harbor Country fire department

Technology and equipment have come a long way over the last 20 years. Weesaw Fire Department experienced that every time they used their decades-old Jaws of Life to gnaw through the stronger metal used in newer vehicles.

Weesaw Township officials knew the fire department's rescue tools needed to be replaced, so they applied for and received the **William J. Deputy Grant** to help offset costs. The brand-new, lightweight and battery-operated tools allow crews to act more quickly without being tethered to fuel pumps or burdened by heavy machinery.

Projects like this are what Bill Deputy had in mind when he established the William J. Deputy Grant endowment. He wanted a way to support Harbor Country municipalities in their growth and care of residents, even long after he was gone.



Weesaw Fire Department crew





## Nonprofit leaders learn scenario, advocacy planning

Berrien Community Foundation organized a series of workshops to equip local nonprofit leaders with new tools and knowledge to steady their organizations should shifting sands come their way.

BCF partnered with Corewell Health Foundation Southwest Michigan and United Way Southwest Michigan to offer two workshops to nonprofits, “Scenario Planning In A Changing Funding Landscape” and “Advocacy In a Complex Environment.” Experts from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University led the sessions.

“As community funders, it is important for us to work together to meet needs,” said BCF President Lisa Cripps Downey. “This time, meeting needs came in the form of workshops to learn, brainstorm and plan for how to navigate this new funding landscape.”

The experts from the Johnson Center took participants through a hands-on exercise to strategically prepare for possible crises that could affect funding, sustainability and the existence of their organization. The advocacy workshop focused on how essential trust is and



Dorothy A. Johnson Center Program Manager Mandy Sharp Eizinger, center, visits with LOGAN Center Chief Program Officer Kristin Wier, left, and The Salvation Army - Benton Harbor Lieutenant Melissa Bledsoe, right, during an exercise.

the factors at play for effective advocacy.

“The event allowed us to spend several hours with like-minded community partners who are also struggling with potential funding challenges,” said Caring Connections Chief Executive Officer Robin McGinnis. “The meeting was extremely helpful and thought-provoking.”

## T.E.A.M. Bulletin

Do you know a teen who has a passion for community? BCF has openings for youth who are going into grades 8 - 10 next year to be part of T.E.A.M. (Teens Exhibiting Able Minds), our youth advisory committee.

As a member, students have the unique opportunity to review grant requests and make recommendations to fund projects that affect youth throughout Berrien County. T.E.A.M. members also get a behind-the-scenes look at nonprofits and learn about how organizations serve their community.

Applications are due by July 1, 2025. To apply, visit [www.berriencommunity.org/TEAM](http://www.berriencommunity.org/TEAM).



T.E.A.M. members from the 2024-2025 school year.

# Tips for making your charitable giving plan

Spring has arrived! It is such a pleasure to hear from so many individuals, families, and businesses about how your charitable giving plans for 2025 are taking shape. If you are already working with Berrien Community Foundation, thank you. If you are considering opening a Donor Advised Fund or other fund this year, we look forward to talking to you about it!

Over the weeks ahead, consider spending a few minutes getting up to speed on trends in charitable giving and ways you can incorporate philanthropy into your life. The team of professionals at BCF would be honored to help you develop a plan. As you consider whether the time might be right for you to formalize your charitable giving, here are three tips to consider—all of which the community foundation can help you achieve:

## **Give to what you know.**

Most people experience the greatest joy from giving to causes that are personally familiar. Personal experience makes it easier to understand how the charity is using your dollars. So, for example, if you've had experience with helping foster children, you are likely to understand how the organization is using your donation to support training for foster parents. Please ask the community foundation team for insights! It's our job to keep up with the good work of charities that are meeting local needs.

## **Give where you are.**

Even with the increasing number of community challenges across the country and the globe, sometimes the greatest needs are right here at



home. BCF can help you identify opportunities to support local charities by gathering information about the overall need and how a particular charity addresses that need. When you give to local organizations, you are in a strong position to have confidence in your gift.

## **Give to the causes you love.**

Donations to charities that are aligned with your own passions make you feel the best and ultimately make the most difference because you're likely to continue giving. The community foundation team is here to help bring your community dreams to life through the power of philanthropy. And that feels great!

If you've already established a Donor Advised Fund or other type of fund with Berrien Community Foundation, or if you are considering getting started with BCF this year, we are here for you!

Call BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey at (269) 983-3304 or email [lisa@berriencommunity.org](mailto:lisa@berriencommunity.org).

## **Upcoming Grant Deadlines**

**Alamar Nonprofit Sustainability Grant - May 1**

**Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grants - June 1**

**Stephen E. Upton Love Your Community Grant - June 1**

**Heart of Cook Foundation - June 9**

**Frederick S. Upton Foundation Grants - June 15**

**Carolyn's Kids Grants - July 1**

**Heart of Cook Grants - July 2**

To apply, visit [www.berriencommunity.org/grants](http://www.berriencommunity.org/grants)

