BERRIEN
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
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Berrien County Gives Back NEWSLETTER

Fall 2026

INSIDE: BCF Awards $280,000 at Annual Celebration



We Can ALL Help!

BCF launches $100,000 Community Challenge supporting critical nonprofits

Nonprofits across Berrien County are being asked to do more with less. Demand for services continues to grow while funding gets cut and becomes harder to secure, leaving many organizations searching for ways to keep meeting critical community needs.

Berrien Community Foundation asked:

"How can we help?"

At BCF's Annual Meeting & Celebration, the Foundation announced its answer: a new **$100,000 Community Challenge Match.**

The first recipients of the challenge are **Caring Connection** (up to $40,000) and **Children's Advocacy Center** (up to $30,000). Another $30,000 is set aside for future nonprofit challenges in 2027.

Caring Connection's Empowerment Center, which provides shelter and support for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and the Children's Advocacy Center, which supports children and families impacted by abuse, are both facing significant funding losses while continuing to serve some of the community's most vulnerable residents.

Now we're asking the community a question:

"How can you help?"

Whether it's $25, $250, or more, every gift can go twice as far through matching funds and help ensure that local families continue to have somewhere to turn for safety, support and healing. Donations can be sent to BCF or directly to the organization.

"We know that this community is generous and kind, so we are challenging you to help," said BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey.

Berrien County has always been a community that shows up for its neighbors. This is one more opportunity to do just that.

To make a gift and help unlock matching funds, visit **www.berriencommunity.org/CommunityChallenge.**

How You Can Help

Give to the Community Challenge

Your gift goes further through matching funds that support Caring Connection and the Children's Advocacy Center:

Connect with a Nonprofit You Love

There are many incredible organizations doing important work across Berrien County. If you're not making a gift to the Community Challenge, consider connecting with a nonprofit you care about to see where your time, talents or generosity can make a difference.

BCF Awards $280,000 in Grants at 2026 Celebration

On October 7, Berrien Community Foundation's 74th Annual Meeting & Celebration brought together friends and partners for a night of stories, laughter and connection.

The evening was all about the people who make Berrien County a great place to be. We looked back on a year filled with generosity, growth and moments that showed what's possible when people care for one another.

BCF awarded $280,000 in grants to local organizations, recognized volunteers and community leaders who go above and beyond, and shared the impact that happens every day because people choose to get involved.

Stephen E. Upton Love Your Community Grant

The Stephen E. Upton Love Your Community Grant celebrates Steve's belief that a little love can go a long way. Mosaic CCDA received $50,000 to expand its Resource Wednesdays and Feel Good Fridge programs, helping ensure more families have access to the food and resources they need by meeting people where they are. Mosaic CCDA is helping more neighbors find the support they need to thrive. *Pictured are Andrew Robinson, Mike Upton and Denisha Hudson.*



Alamar Nonprofit Sustainability Grant

It's important to take care of the people and organizations who take care of others. This is the driving motivation behind the Alamar Nonprofit Sustainability Grant. It gives agencies the chance to invest in themselves so that they can continue to do the vital work of improving lives in Berrien County.

Water Street Glassworks received $75,000 to hire an education program manager, allowing the executive director to focus on organizational and fund development while supporting the growth of its glass arts programs. *Pictured is Donna Sauers.*

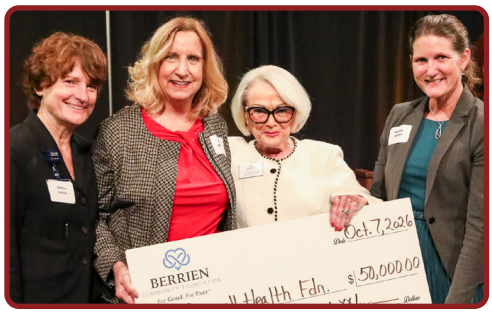


Carolyn's Kids

Driven by her love for children, Carolyn Hanson created this grant opportunity to help young people thrive. She believes that investing in children today builds a stronger future for our community. Through these grants, she helps children grow, build confidence and discover all that's possible.



Children's Music Workshop received $50,000 to expand opportunities for youth arts education. *Pictured are: Sandi Lewis, Becca Thiele, Carolyn Hanson, Robert Elliott-Schafnitz, Angie Harris.*



Corewell Health Foundation received $50,000 to buy equipment that allows non-verbal children to communicate with family, peers and healthcare providers. *Pictured are: Sheila Varga, Susan Burkholz, Carolyn Hanson, Melinda Gruber.*



CASA of Southwest Michigan received $50,000 to support the recruitment and training of volunteers. *Pictured are: Fran Chickering, Trish Conroy, Carolyn Hanson, Audrey Salesberry.*

Celebrating Community Champions

The Golden Acorn Awards recognize the people and organizations whose love for Berrien County inspires them to go above and beyond for their neighbors.



BCF Board Member John Guinness, left, with BCYF's Karen Klug and Corey Burks

Golden Acorn Award for Excellence

Berrien County Youth Fair received the award for its outstanding partnership in BCF's Meat The Need. This year's livestock donated through the fair auction was turned into more than 2,500 pounds of ground pork and distributed to 24 local food pantries, helping feed families across Berrien County. Fair staff also stepped up behind the scenes to solve unexpected challenges and keep the program moving forward.

In recognition of its impact, the youth fair received a $4,000 grant to support its continued work.



From left, WHW's Liz Garey, June Bowman and Nancy Fette with BCF Board Member Elizabeth McCree

Golden Acorn Volunteer Award

This award was presented to **Women Helping Women of Southwest Michigan** for their outstanding service to the community. This group of dynamic women raise their hands whenever BCF (and numerous other nonprofits!) put out a call for volunteers. From helping seniors complete their BCF scholarship application to sorting food and clothing donations, this group shows up wherever help is needed.

For their willingness to serve, WHWSM will be able to direct a $1,000 grant to the nonprofit of their choice.

What a Night!



BCF's Maureen Lindenberg-Bradford as "Julia Child" gives Jessica Ishmael a cooking lesson on the Charlie Cart, one of two mobile kitchens funded by BCF's Women's Giving Circle to support community nutrition.



BCF's special edition 75th anniversary shirts are pretty sweet. We unveiled them at the celebration and Carrie Vill shows one off.



"All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" as recited by Ray and Madison Lipscomb, Camille and Adrienne Glisson, Denise McGowan-Tracy and Bill Downey.



One of the joys of the night is reconnecting with old friends. Former T.E.A.M. member Dwight Bowman II and T.E.A.M. advisor Carol Oehlhaffen shared a long-overdue hug!

Marilyn Schanze's Inspiring Legacy

Marilyn Schanze believed in possibilities. Whether championing education, supporting the arts or strengthening her community, she saw opportunities to make a difference and inspired others to do the same.

Marilyn passed away in September, but the generosity, optimism and vision she shared with her husband, Richard, continue to shape Berrien County.

Nearly 30 years ago, Marilyn and Richard made a gift that would leave a lasting mark on Berrien County, establishing a $2 million irrevocable charitable trust to support Berrien Community Foundation. And in true Marilyn fashion, they didn't just announce it. They surprised everyone.

The Schanzes had planned to make the gift anonymously and went back and forth on the decision until just hours before the annual meeting. They changed their minds after hearing a radio discussion about the power of charitable giving and how public gifts can inspire others to give.

The surprise announcement filled the room with excitement, and the Schanzes' hope was simple: inspire others to invest in the community they loved.

Many donors came to BCF after hearing about the Schanzes' gift. As respected business leaders, Richard and Marilyn were trusted throughout the community, and their confidence in the Foundation gave others confidence, too.





Marilyn Schanze, left, announces a $2 million charitable trust at BCF's Annual Meeting in 1998. Below, Marilyn is pictured at one of many community events.

Marilyn helped shape BCF during a pivotal time. She joined the board of directors in 1992 and became the Foundation's first female board chair in 1997.

Her passion for education helped launch BCF's Education Endowment and inspired a teacher recognition program that evolved into today's Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grants.

"Marilyn believed in investing in people and opportunities," said BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey. "From supporting teachers and the arts to inspiring others to give, she helped make this community stronger."

Philanthropy Corner

Five Steps to Sort Through Year-End Giving Mail

If your mailbox is any indication, giving season must be right around the corner! You've likely started getting reminders, tax tips and appeals from organizations you care about. It can be a lot! Berrien Community Foundation can help you sort through the noise.

Here are five steps to guide your giving:

#1. Start with your goals. Think about what you want your giving to accomplish. Supporting favorite nonprofits? Addressing community needs? Start with your purpose and let that guide your decisions.

#2. Consider what you give. Cash is common, but it may not always be the most tax-smart option. Appreciated assets such as stock can sometimes provide additional tax benefits.

#3. Review the latest tax rules. Recent tax law changes may affect the benefits of charitable giving and how you structure your donations.

#4. Don't overlook your IRA. If you're 70½ or older, a Qualified Charitable Distribution can be a tax-efficient way to support charitable causes.

#5. Don't wait until December. Year-end gifts often take longer than expected, especially when stocks or other assets are involved.

Contact BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey to talk about how you can use your generosity to accomplish what matters most to you. Call her at (269) 983-3304.