

History of the Watertown Area Community Foundation

By: Julianne Endres

There are a lot of little stories that make up the whole story of the Watertown Area Community Foundation. Once upon a time... more than 40 years ago, city fathers began talking about creating a community foundation in Watertown. The idea was actually suggested 13 years prior at the Lion's Club swimming pool dedication by John Lowrie (now deceased). Lowrie talked about a 'spirit of giving back' and establishing a 'total community.' As president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1974, he again announced the objective of establishing a community foundation. Several other civic leaders joined in the effort.

It all became "real" when a formal application for 501 © (3) status was drafted and dated February 2, 1979. The first appointments to the Foundation Board were: Floyd Snyder by the Chamber of Commerce, Robert Cockle, Watertown School Board; Robert Carey, Norwest Bank; Loretta Hoff, City Council; and Clark Redlinger, Farmers and Merchants Bank and Trust (all deceased). The organizational meeting of the Board took place on May 10, 1979, and Redlinger was elected the Foundation's first Chairman and Hoff, secretary.

"We were pressed into service because Bob Carey said there was \$3,000 left over from Watertown's Centennial and Ed Harper left \$35,000 to 'Watertown' to support outdoor band concerts and plant trees," recalled Irv Hinderaker, during an interview in 2014. "A community foundation seemed to be the answer we were looking for. The group was desperate for formal documentation to establish the Foundation," the retired attorney explained. "That sent me to work countless hours researching the IRS code."

The result: The original Declaration of Trust and Bylaws of the first community foundation in South Dakota. The document stated that the Foundation could receive property for educational, cultural, charitable or benevolent purposes for the benefit and improvement of Watertown residents' quality of life. Watertown now had a community savings account, that in Irv's words has gone "'beyond any



This photo of Dale Christensen and Irv Hinderaker was taken in 2017. Hinderaker wrote the bylaws of the Watertown Community Foundation when it began in 1979 and served on the Foundation Board from 1987-1991. He is now 97 years old. Christensen was involved with the Foundation first as a trustee representative more than 35 years ago and he served on the Board from 2006-2016.

of the founders' imaginations and magnified itself again and again."

Foundation representatives have heard Irv's comments echoed this 40th anniversary year as many long-time "friends" of the Foundation reminisce.

"That box they talk about... I remember that," said Deb Popham who was the Foundation's interim director in 1999. Yes, the story goes that there was no "office", but rather, the Foundation's business was neat and compact in a box stored in the broom closet at City Hall for a number of years. In 1993, the Foundation moved to an office at the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce. In 1996, the Terry Redlin family invited the Foundation to have an office at the Redlin Art Center. Then, in 2002, the Foundation moved to its current location at 211 East Kemp Avenue in the heart of downtown. The building was a gift from the Kenneth Way family.

The Ways' support of the community and the Foundation was instrumental and still is today. In fact, all past and current donors, as well as nonprofit partners and past and current board members, have played a role in the Foundation's continuing success.

There have even been times when the nonprofit was the donor. The YMCA's \$80,000 gift in 1980 was an integral stepping stone for the Foundation's early

years. The donation dissolved the local Young Men's Christian Association after a 60 –year history here. The only stipulation attached to the gift was that it benefit the citizens of the Watertown area. Chairman Redlinger had stated then that the YMCA Board members' passions would continue to thrive because of this gift.

"The names of past YMCA board members, some of them sons of those who founded the organization, shall be perpetuated by this generous gift. The earnings from this gift will be reinvested in the community with contributions to organizations or activities which are representative of the ideals for which the YMCA stands."

That's one story about one gift. Each gift has a story.

Some gifts came by surprise, remembered Dale Christensen, whose first dealings with the Foundation more than 35 years ago were as a Norwest (now Wells Fargo) trustee representative for the Foundation. "The Rislovs' gift was unexpected," Christensen said, of the \$650,000 bequest in 1999. Others, including the Antritter Sisters', were a culmination of years of meetings and taking notes.

Property of many kinds, small and large cash gifts, as well as bequests, have been given to the Foundation. Gifts become part of a permanent endowment which means they will help the Watertown area forever. Only a percentage of the earnings are spent and the Foundation continues to operate on less than a 1.5% administrative fee per year.

Christensen and others worked with some donors who wished to remain anonymous. The Foundation continues to administer several "Anonymous Funds."

Gifts vary in size. Some gifts are "unrestricted" others are designated for a specific cause/organization or "field of interest." One thing is tried and true: all donors (anonymous or not), have had a passion for this community they call "home" and want to make a difference by giving back.

That support continues to make a difference. Since first awarding grants in 1981, the Foundation has awarded more than \$7 million in grants to approximately 200 nonprofit organizations and programs. Originally, the Foundation awarded grants annually. The granting schedule evolved to quarterly and eventually monthly in addition to occasional "emergency" grants that arise.

One such emergency grant was a request from the Codington County Search & Rescue in May of 2002 for a jet ski. There was extensive flooding in our area and knew a jet ski would be put to good use. They didn't know then that they would be using it shortly thereafter in their search and recovery of a young man who had fallen overboard while fishing at Lake Poinsett. While that grant wasn't about a happy ending, it was certainly a necessity and one that would help bring closure for the victim's family.

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And just like noted above, the "community" part of the Foundation encompasses people, programs and places outside of Watertown. "Area" was added to the Community Foundation's name in 2015 to emphasize the fact that the Foundation extends beyond city limits.

To date, the Foundation has grown to approximately \$20 million in assets. With that growth, the Board has expanded as well. In 2018, two at-large members were added to the five-member volunteer Board to better represent the greater Watertown region.

It's the year 2019, and as the Foundation celebrates 40 years of "looking forward and giving back" it is excited about the years yet to come... but that, too, is another story...

REMEMBERING – Looking at photos of past grants and board members are from left, Liam Culhane and Charlie Ewalt, Board Members, Scott Olson trustee representative, Great Western Bank; Angie Reppe, Board member; and Greg Blow, Foundation volunteer.

