

# An idea that wasn't all wet

## Community Foundation traces origin to swimming pool event

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It's 2019 and, as always, the Watertown Area Community Foundation is "looking forward and giving back." But this year, the Foundation is also "looking back" 40 years and beyond.

The Watertown Area Community Foundation was established in 1979. However, the idea was actually suggested 13 years prior at the Lion's Club swimming pool dedication.

"If we can generate this spirit throughout

Watertown, a spirit of giving, yes, but also a spirit of contributing to a community that has meant much to all of us, we will be well on our way to establishing a total community," John Lowrie, former *Public Opinion* publisher, was quoted as saying at the pool dedication.

The idea was nurtured by several community committees and just prior to that monumental Watertown Centennial Celebration, the Watertown Community Foundation was born – the first community foundation in South Dakota.



**HISTORY IN THE MAKING** — With the stroke of a pen these five charter board members have officially brought into being the Watertown Community Foundation. After years of unflinching work by many the realization of a dream became reality Thursday evening. Board members agreed that the foundation is the perfect vehicle whereby individuals, corporations and

families can designate funds by gift or will to the personal benefit and improvement of the quality of life in the Watertown area. Charter board members signing the official bylaws of the Foundation include Lauretta Hoff, secretary; Robert Carey, vice chairman; Dr. Robert Cackle, Clark Redlinger, chairman; and Floyd (Bill) Snyder. (Public Opinion photo by John Lewis)

The original board of the Watertown Area Community Foundation, shown in this 1979 *Public Opinion* photo, included (from left) Lauretta Hoff, Robert Carey, Dr. Robert Cackle, Clark Redlinger and Floyd "Bill" Snyder.

Clark Redlinger (deceased) was elected chairman of the foundation's board. He and local attorney Irving Hinderaker formalized the Foundation and assured Centennial contributors that any leftover funds would be designated to the Watertown Community Foundation.

Those remaining funds, came to \$3,000 – which became the first entry in the Foundation's bank account. At that time, and for several years, the Foundation "office" was a box stored in the broom closet at City Hall.

In addition to Redlinger, the other charter board members were Laretta Hoff, secretary; Robert Carey, vice chairman; Dr. Robert Cockle and Floyd "Bill" Snyder (all are since deceased). The board met as needed and started awarding its first grants on an annual basis in 1981.

The Foundation as outlined in its "Declaration of Trust" could receive property for educational, cultural, charitable or benevolent purposes for the benefit and improvement of Watertown area residents' quality of life.

Property of many kinds, small and large cash gifts, as well as bequests, may be given to the Foundation. Gifts that donors give to the Foundation 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 percent administrative fee per year.

Forty years later, that "spirit of giving" is alive and well. The Foundation has grown to \$20 million in assets and has awarded more than \$7 million in grants to approximately 200 nonprofit groups and organizations.

Community foundations vary greatly in asset size, but all share the common goal of serving donors, nonprofit organization and the community as a whole. In addition to this, one of a community foundation's special functions is to provide effective leadership and coordinate the needs and services in its communities so that charitable gifts are used effectively to meet a community's most critical needs.

Today, there are more than 750 community foundations in the United States and a handful of community foundations in South Dakota. In addition, several communities have an account with the South Dakota Community Foundation.

The Watertown Area Community Foundation will continue to invest in the vitality of the greater Watertown area through the generosity of its donors (past, present and future) who share the passion for "looking forward and giving back."