

SUMMER 2023

REPORT



OUTDOORS
for everyone

Community
Foundation

FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

IN THIS ISSUE

- 03** Message from the president
- 04** Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund enhances our quality of life
- 05** Community Foundation tapped for \$100M Unified Greenway Endowment
- 07** Q&A: Trustee Matt Cullen discusses Joe Louis Greenway, family philanthropy
- 09** Community Foundation takes the stage at annual Mackinac Policy Conference
- 10** Community Foundation news
- 11** St. Clair County trail undergoes accessibility upgradess
- 12** Funding supports solar-powered climate resilience models in Detroit
- 13** Grant transforms Huron, Rouge River watershed anglers into 'citizen scientists'



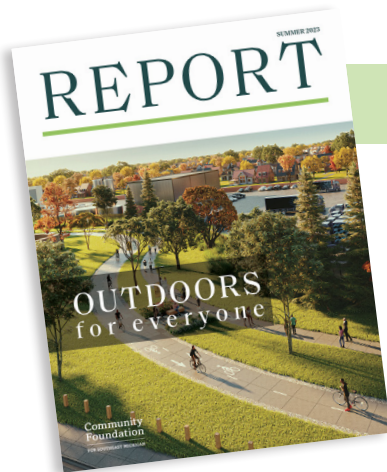
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09



13



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Cover: Rendering courtesy of the Joe Louis Greenway Partnership
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VISION AND MISSION

VISION: To create permanent positive change in people's lives

MISSION: We enhance the quality of life in southeast Michigan

We promote and facilitate permanent change in the seven counties of Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, Livingston and St. Clair, and we help donors invest in organizations they care about nationwide.

We do this by:

- ▶ Making strategic investments in programs and organizations that benefit the region
- ▶ Equipping organizations and the public with knowledge and information that will lead to positive change
- ▶ Building endowment – community capital – to meet our region's needs today and tomorrow
- ▶ Providing expert assistance to donors and their advisors in their charitable planning

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Richard L. DeVore

Summer is a beautiful time to enjoy the outdoors in southeast Michigan.

But this year feels different.

Spiking temperatures. Catastrophic storms that spark power outages and flooding. Unhealthy air quality due to greenhouse gas emissions and choking wildfire smoke.

The signs of climate change are all around us.

Fortunately, individuals and organizations throughout our region are working to develop innovative strategies that can lead the way to climate resilience and healthy outdoor access for all residents.

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan can back these types of projects, which have the potential to be replicated throughout our seven-county area or expanded on by other funders for greater impact, thanks to the flexibility of our general endowment and various endowed field of interest funds. Some of these support area nature conservancies, watershed councils, beautification organizations and greenway-development partnerships throughout our region.

Growing our Southeast Michigan Forever Fund and other endowed funds also builds the community capital we'll need to respond nimbly to unforeseen climate change challenges in the future.

For example, two recent grants from the Southeast Michigan Forever Fund that you'll read about in this report promote building community-level climate resilience. This need came into stark focus following a summer storm in 2021 that dumped half a foot of rain on Detroit in a matter of hours, prompting power outages and flooding. Climate change is likely to make extreme weather events like this more common.

Climate change also is an important topic to consider as we witness the most significant intergenerational wealth transfer in history. Recently, guest speaker Michael

Moody, Ph.D., shared his expertise on next-generation and family philanthropy with a packed crowd of Community Foundation guests at the Detroit Athletic Club. Among the insights he noted was that younger donors are committed to making an impact on issues like climate change. Moody also said many next-gen philanthropists are willing to continue their family's legacy when given room to fit their own goals into the family story.

In this report, you'll read how Community Foundation trustee Matt Cullen and his wife, Karen, are having these types of conversations about family philanthropy with their sons, as well as creating equitable access to the outdoors via their role in the historic Joe Louis Greenway development.

When I think about the Community Foundation's part in this project — as steward of the \$100 million Unified Greenway Endowment that will be used to maintain and operate the greenway and Detroit riverfront for future generations — I feel excitement, but also a huge sense of responsibility. It's a responsibility to our children and our children's children, but we're a community foundation and this is what we do. Our mission is to improve the quality of life in southeast Michigan, today and in perpetuity. A big part of that is ensuring we have accessible parks, trails and blueways, as well as clean air and water for all residents.

I invite you to help out however you can. Volunteer with one of our community partners. Give to our Southeast Michigan Forever Fund. Contact our Donor Services department at donorservices@cfsem.org if you'd like to create a more tailored solution. Or, simply spread the word about our work.

There's room for everyone to help protect our environment and support the outdoor spaces we rely on to improve our health, sustain our economy, build community and make southeast Michigan a desirable place to live, work and play. ■

Richard L. DeVore, President

Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund

enhances our quality of life

More than a quarter century after it was established, grants from the Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan continue to support clean air and water, environmental education, public spaces and community engagement throughout our region.

The fund was born out of the Great Lakes Community Foundation Environmental Collaborative, a two-year program that convened communities around environmental issues.

The collaborative engaged the Community Foundation and 20 other foundations throughout the Great Lakes Basin. The international effort spanned six Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario.

It was an important program for the Community Foundation, as four of the foundation's seven counties — Macomb, St. Clair, Wayne and Monroe — border the Great Lakes.

Participating foundations focused on issues such as urban sprawl and transportation, land use, waste management, and air and water quality. Each foundation raised an environmental endowment fund to support its region, with matching funds coming from the Great Lakes Protection Fund and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

As a result, the Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan was established in 1997 with \$75,000 in initial gifts. The fund supports programs and projects such as expanding public parks, developing school curricula for young people, and investing in community gardens to help address flooding while beautifying neighborhoods.



The Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan helped to support the Skiff and Schooner program on the Detroit River. The program lets students from throughout metro Detroit experience the river from the decks of a tall ship while learning about the environmental and cultural heritage of their communities.

Over the years, money from this modest fund has been pooled with money from other environment-focused funds at the Community Foundation to make a significant impact. Examples of recent grants that have been supported, in part, by the Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund include:

- A grant to American Forests to analyze the costs and benefits of planting 15,000 trees per year in Detroit, particularly in neighborhoods with a history of disinvestment.
- A grant to the Skiff and Schooner program, piloted by the University of Michigan's Detroit River Story Lab in partnership with Detroit's Green Door Initiative. The program lets school-age students from throughout metro Detroit experience the river from the decks of a tall ship while learning about the environmental and cultural heritage of their communities.

These recent grants from the Great Lakes Environmental Endowment Fund, established more than a quarter-century ago, speak to the enduring power of endowed funds at the Community Foundation to create permanent, positive change and improve the quality of life throughout our region. ■



Joe Louis Greenway funders, partners entrust Community Foundation with \$100 million endowment

The 27.5-mile Joe Louis Greenway will connect the award-winning Detroit riverfront with 23 communities throughout Detroit, Highland Park, Hamtramck and Dearborn. It was designed, with input from neighboring residents, to create healthy green spaces and inclusive economic opportunities.

A historic public-private partnership is breathing life into a 27.5-mile greenway that will connect the award-winning Detroit riverfront with 23 communities throughout Detroit, Highland Park, Hamtramck and Dearborn.

The accessible, paved loop — collectively known as the Joe Louis Greenway — will be comprised of a portion of the Detroit riverfront, the Dequindre Cut, the newly opened Southwest Greenway and additional stretches that are under construction now or scheduled for completion within the next decade.

The Joe Louis Greenway will bring people together to enjoy parks, bike paths, music venues, arts, programming and economic opportunities for all. Connector spurs, like the ones from McNichols and Livernois, will allow residents deep within the city to access beautiful green spaces all the way to the Detroit riverfront. The pathway will create a healthy, walkable urbanity to improve the quality of life for Detroiters and make the region a desirable place for young people to live, work, play and invest as the state faces a daunting population decline.

The Unified Greenway Campaign — an unprecedented collaboration of corporate, philanthropic, and governmental

funders — has raised \$229 million in less than two years toward its \$350 million goal for the project, making it one of the most successful campaigns in the country. The funds will be used to build the 27.5-mile Joe Louis Greenway, complete the Detroit riverfront and create an endowment at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan that will support their maintenance and operation for future generations.

Understanding both the needs of the community and endowment-building uniquely positions the Community Foundation to support transformational public space projects like the Joe Louis Greenway from start to finish and beyond. The foundation holds approximately \$1 billion in permanently endowed funds and has more than 30 years of experience supporting public spaces.

Development has national significance

The Unified Greenway Campaign includes the City of Detroit, which owns and is designing and constructing the greenway; the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, which manages public spaces along the Detroit International Riverfront and the Dequindre Cut; and the Joe Louis

Greenway Partnership, a nonprofit that will steward the trail's development and programming in perpetuity.

Private foundation funders to date include the:

- Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- William Davidson Foundation
- Gilbert Family Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Hudson-Webber Foundation

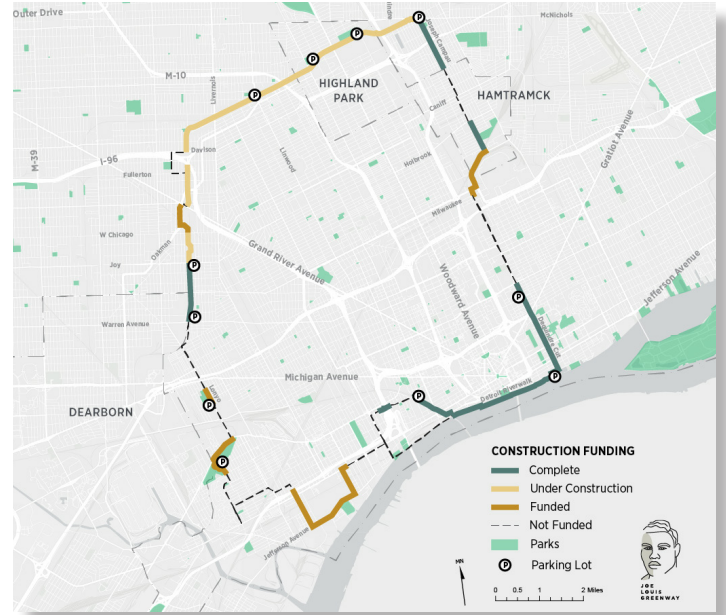
The \$229 million raised so far also includes approximately \$150 million in public funds from the State of Michigan, Wayne County and the City of Detroit.

Previously announced commitments to the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy from the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation, Ford Motor Co., and Huron-Clinton Metroparks support the Unified Greenway Campaign's goals, as well.

"The early success of this campaign — thanks to our funding partners, together with the City of Detroit's commitment of ongoing support — is historic for our community and is nationally significant in the development of urban public spaces," says Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Chairman Matt Cullen, who envisioned the Unified Greenway Campaign and serves on the Community Foundation's Board of Trustees.

"THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IS HONORED TO MANAGE THE UNIFIED GREENWAY ENDOWMENT, WHICH WILL PROVIDE FOR THE MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION OF BOTH THE WORLD-CLASS DETROIT RIVERFRONT AND JOE LOUIS GREENWAY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS."

– COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PRESIDENT RICHARD (RIC) DEVORE



The accessible, paved loop will be comprised of a portion of the Detroit riverfront, the Dequindre Cut, the newly opened Southwest Greenway and additional stretches that are under construction now or scheduled for completion within the next decade.

Community Foundation manages endowment

The \$350 million Unified Greenway Campaign investment in landmark public spaces will include:

- \$200 million to build the Joe Louis Greenway
- \$50 million to complete the Detroit riverfront
- \$100 million to establish the Unified Greenway Endowment at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

"The Community Foundation is honored to manage the Unified Greenway Endowment, which will provide for the maintenance and operation of both the world-class Detroit riverfront and Joe Louis Greenway for future generations," Community Foundation President Richard (Ric) DeVore says.

"Beautiful public spaces and connected, vibrant communities have a tremendous impact for Detroit residents," he says. "Turning this vision into reality is the result of a deep, long-term collaboration between our partners and proves that, when we work together, positive change is possible." ■



Q&A

Trustee Matt Cullen discusses Joe Louis Greenway, family philanthropy

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan Board of Trustees member and JACK Entertainment Chairman Matt Cullen and his wife, Karen, have partnered with the Community Foundation to create a tradition of giving that the couple is working to ensure will continue with their sons.

“THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION WAS AN EASY CHOICE FOR (MY WIFE, KAREN, AND ME). IT HAS A STERLING REPUTATION, A TALENTED AND PASSIONATE TEAM, AND A STRONG CONNECTION TO THE COMMUNITY. PARTNERING WITH THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION ALLOWS FOR INFORMED PHILANTHROPY NOW AND PROVIDES A SOLID PLATFORM TO POTENTIALLY INCLUDE FUTURE GENERATIONS IN PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVES.”

– JACK ENTERTAINMENT CHAIR MATT CULLEN, ON CREATING THE CULLEN FAMILY FOUNDATION AT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

To say Matt Cullen has made an impact on the metro Detroit community is an understatement.

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan Board of Trustees member and JACK Entertainment chairman also chairs the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, is a member of the Joe Louis Greenway Partnership board and serves in several additional civic leadership roles. He’s known as the visionary behind the Detroit International Riverfront and has been a key player in transforming the Joe Louis Greenway dream into reality.

Cullen and his wife, Karen, a retired communications executive and fellow community leader, also have partnered with the Community Foundation to create a tradition of giving that the couple is working to ensure will continue with their sons. They’ve established a donor-advised fund that lets them grant to various charities; a multimillion-dollar, permanently endowed fund for the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy; as well as the Cullen Family Foundation.

The Cullen Family Foundation is a supporting organization of the Community Foundation that promotes more just and inclusive communities by advancing public spaces, the environment, social justice, economic development, racial justice, youth development and education.

Here, Matt Cullen shares some reflections on the Joe Louis Greenway and partnering with the Community Foundation to create a philanthropic family legacy.

Question: How did your idea, decades ago, to transform the industrial Detroit riverfront into a beautiful, accessible gathering place for all evolve into the Joe Louis Greenway project?

Answer: After leading General Motors' acquisition of the Renaissance Center for its global headquarters (as the automaker's former general manager), I quickly became focused on opening the complex to the city and the riverfront. The GM Wintergarden was the first step in that process, but it wasn't long before we began to explore extending public access to the rest of GM's property. Then we wondered why we couldn't keep going with that transformation. That was the genesis of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and our vision of building a beautiful, safe and inviting riverfront along the 5.5 miles from the MacArthur Bridge to the Ambassador Bridge. The results have been far beyond anything we could have imagined when we started 20 years ago.

The opportunity to continue to build on that success by extending the Joe Louis Greenway through the city was incredibly compelling. The partnerships that have come together to support that outcome, with the full involvement of the local community, are broad-based and focused on our collective success. The progress to date has been incredible.

Question: What do you hope the Joe Louis Greenway's impacts will be?

Answer: I hope it will build on the success of the riverfront, and bring that same transformation and connectivity throughout the city. I hope it will be a place of beauty for the 23 (nearby) neighborhoods to enjoy and an asset for our entire community to explore. We also believe that the JLG, like the riverfront, will be a driver for economic development. We want to make sure that the development opportunities are inclusive and available to all.

Question: Why did funders and partners choose the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to manage the \$100 million Unified Greenway Endowment that will support the maintenance and operation of the Joe Louis Greenway and the Detroit riverfront for future generations?

Answer: The Community Foundation has been a cornerstone of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy since its inception and is known as a steadfast steward of financial resources to support our region into the future. In our early days, it was an obvious choice for the Detroit Riverfront

Conservancy to partner with the Community Foundation because of the confidence their involvement provided to our funders. When it came time for us to build upon that success with a complex joint endowment structure that would pass scrutiny from the most sophisticated funders in our state, the Community Foundation was the only organization that we considered.

Question: What inspires the commitment you and your wife, Karen, have to improving the quality of life and creating just, inclusive communities throughout Detroit and the metro area?

Answer: It's our hometown and we've spent our entire lives here. It's where our family and friends are. We both adhere to the belief that it is incumbent on folks to be a positive force in their communities, to give back and to strive to make things better for everyone. To make our community a place where people want to live, work and play. For that to happen, we believe we need to prioritize opportunities for those that may not have been provided them in the past.

Question: As philanthropists, why did you and Karen choose to establish the Cullen Family Foundation as a supporting organization of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan?

Answer: The Community Foundation was an easy choice for us. It has a sterling reputation, a talented and passionate team, and a strong connection to the community. Partnering with the Community Foundation allows for informed philanthropy now and provides a solid platform to potentially include future generations in philanthropic initiatives.

Question: What kinds of conversations have you and Karen had with your children about creating a family legacy?

Answer: It's a work in progress, but we've coalesced around a mission statement for the Cullen Family Foundation and our three boys are now involved in evaluating all grant applications. With the support of the Community Foundation team, we have been able to have direct engagement with potential grant recipients and we all work together to make tough decisions on prioritization. When the next generation is making the final decisions, we hope the infrastructure provided by the Community Foundation, together with the shared family learnings that we're going through now, will position them to make effective choices. ■



Community Foundation is a ‘force multiplier’ when it comes to public-private partnerships

Hudson-Webber Foundation President and CEO Melanca Clark, left, and Community Foundation President Richard (Ric) DeVore co-moderated a Mackinac Policy Conference panel about public-private partnerships. Panelists included Michigan Justice Fund Director Ashley Carter, second from left, New Economy Initiative Executive Director Wafa Dinaro, center, and Joe Louis Greenway Partnership Executive Director Leona Medley.

A panel at the Mackinac Policy Conference in May explored how public-private partnerships can intersect to solve some of the state’s most pressing problems.

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan President Richard (Ric) DeVore and Hudson-Webber Foundation President and CEO Melanca Clark co-moderated the conversation, which included New Economy Initiative Executive Director Wafa Dinaro, Michigan Justice Fund Director Ashley Carter and Joe Louis Greenway Partnership Executive Director Leona Medley.

Each leader began by outlining their project’s mission:

- The New Economy Initiative, an initiative of the Community Foundation, seeks to grow an inclusive culture of entrepreneurship in southeast Michigan that benefits all residents and strengthens the regional economy.
- The Michigan Justice Fund, another Community Foundation initiative, works to stem the flow of individuals into the criminal justice system, support the investment of public dollars to community-driven alternatives to incarceration, and ensure those who are returning home after incarceration receive the support they need to flourish.
- The Joe Louis Greenway Partnership is a nonprofit that will develop and manage the 27.5-mile greenway connecting Detroit, Dearborn, Highland Park and Hamtramck.

Among these seemingly disparate public-private partnerships, inclusive, equitable economic development was a common theme on the Mackinac stage.

“For example, Dinaro said because entrepreneurship has a low barrier to entry, NEI can step in to provide opportunities for returning citizens and insert them into the entrepreneurial pipeline,” the Detroit Regional Chamber observed. “Building on this, Carter suggested investment in career training for formerly incarcerated people as an obvious solution to Michigan’s workforce shortage. Additionally, Dinaro said that residents of the neighborhoods along the Joe Louis Greenway should be included in the development of their communities and have a voice when it comes to what the business landscape looks like.”

Collaboration between the three initiatives exemplifies how the Community Foundation is a place where funders and partners can come together to make positive change.

“In the ecosystem of philanthropy, the Community Foundation plays a really special role,” moderator Melanca Clark said. “It’s a table for funders to come together where we can align around shared objectives. Certainly, the Michigan Justice Fund and NEI are examples of funders coming together to invest our resources together and have a cohesive voice as we enter into different initiatives and public-private partnerships. That’s been a real force multiplier.” ■

Community Foundation news

Michigan Justice Fund exhibit on display at Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit

The Michigan Justice Fund — an initiative of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan — in partnership with the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, the Prison Creative Arts Project at the University of Michigan, and the Museum of Contemporary Arts Detroit, has unveiled an exhibition called “Free Your Mind: Art and Incarceration in Michigan.” The exhibit aims to showcase the inner worlds of incarcerated individuals and address the fundamental issues that shape conversations around incarceration today. The exhibition will continue in Mike Kelley’s Mobile Homestead at the MOCAD until Sept. 3.

New Economy Initiative grants \$2 million, launches pilot to boost microbusinesses

The New Economy Initiative, an initiative of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, in June announced more than \$2 million in grants to drive inclusive small-business growth in southeast Michigan. Four of the grants will fund the Capital On Ramp Program, an innovative pilot that will help established microbusinesses with 10 or fewer employees cut through red tape to secure capital.

Community Foundation supports statewide recreation partnership

The Community Foundation has joined a statewide partnership designed to equitably steward more than \$28 million to expand access to healthy indoor and outdoor recreation programs for people in marginalized communities. The Council of Michigan Foundations, in collaboration with the Michigan Office of Foundation Liaison and through the Statewide Equity Fund, will work with the Michigan



The Michigan Justice Fund-sponsored exhibit “Free Your Mind: Art and Incarceration in Michigan” will continue until Sept. 3 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit.

Department of Natural Resources to distribute a portion of the American Rescue Plan Act funds in the DNR’s Michigan Spark Grants program. The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is among more than a dozen community foundations in Michigan that will provide coordination and technical assistance as the program proceeds.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Funds award \$800,000 in grants to 36 organizations

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation in May announced \$800,000 in grants to 36 organizations from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Funds, which focus on regional caregiving, design and access, and youth sports, as well as the Grosse Pointe community. Since the funds were established in 2016, more than 420 grants totaling \$10.2 million have been awarded.

Pontiac Funders Collaborative investment tops \$10 million, adds PNC Bank as funder

The Pontiac Funders Collaborative — an initiative of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan that works to improve the quality of life in Pontiac through positive, community-driven change — announced in May that it has invested more than \$5 million since its inception in 2020. Building on this momentum, funders have committed over \$5 million more that will be used during the next three years. They also welcomed PNC Bank to their ranks. ■

St. Clair County trail undergoes accessibility upgrades

Maintaining our public parks and trails isn't the most popular type of work to fund, but it's crucial to ensuring all southeast Michigan residents have access to enjoy the outdoors.

The Community Foundation has a long history of stepping into this funding gap to prioritize support for the long-term maintenance of greenways and blueways that enhance the quality of life in our region.

Starting in 2001, the GreenWays Initiative raised \$33 million in foundation and private contributions and leveraged over \$125 million in matching investments to help more than 80 municipalities develop, finance and construct over 100 miles of interconnected greenways.

Building on the work of the GreenWays Initiative, The Great Lakes Way® is helping to create, connect, and support 160 miles of greenways and 156 miles of coastal blueways from Toledo to Port Huron.

The permanently endowed Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Trails Maintenance Fund at the Community Foundation ensures the work of the GreenWays Initiative and The Great Lakes Way continues to benefit southeast Michigan in perpetuity. When a trail or greenway is washed out, damaged, or otherwise unavailable for recreation, the fund can provide grants to help repair or upgrade it — a perfect example of the importance of endowment in carrying on the mission of conservation.

A recent grant from the fund is helping East China Township resurface its portion of the Bridge to Bay Trail and ensure it complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Bridge to Bay Trail extends along 50 miles of shoreline in St. Clair County, down to the border of Macomb County, including a seven-mile strip in East China Township. The work



A Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Trails Maintenance Fund grant is helping East China Township resurface its portion of the Bridge to Bay Trail and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

at East China Township Park will include resurfacing the trail to eliminate cracks and dips, and improving the ramps to three footbridges.

“It used to be you'd get to the end of the trail and then you have to kind of get up to get onto the bridge,” East China Township Manager Cynthia Paparelli says. “It just wasn't helpful for a lot of people who had mobility issues — not only wheelchairs, but even tripping hazards. So, we're getting that evened out.”

Paparelli says East China Township Park and the Bridge to Bay Trail that runs through it are vital to the community's identity and well-being.

“Having this trail is a bragging point for the city,” Paparelli says. “We don't have much as far as restaurants and businesses. What draws people is we've got a sledding hill, we've got the trail, pickleball courts, multiple playscape pavilions.

“From the beginner trail rider to the most advanced, anyone can ride on our trail,” Paparelli says. “There's just one small crossing across the road, but the rest is very nature-based. It's used extensively, every day. Even in the wintertime, we try and keep it safe and clear.” ■

Blueprints to build climate resilience link sun, neighbors

During an era of increased power outages, floods and pollution, harnessing solar energy is one way for communities to build climate resilience.

Two recent grants from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan focus on expanding solar access and creating community energy hubs that can provide neighbors with a stable source of heat in the winter, cooling in the summer and a place to charge their phones and medical devices during power outages.

“These projects provide leverage for BIPOC leaders who have voiced the desire for clean, consistent access to energy, but who have been largely excluded from the benefits of renewable energy due to lack of funds, lack of political will or lack of social links to affluent investors,” says Greg Yankee, director of Arts and Environmental Initiatives at the Community Foundation.

One grant to the University of Michigan builds on a previous pilot project in collaboration with Family 1st Solar to install a solar-powered rainwater harvesting system at The Joy Project in Detroit. The solar-powered system allowed the urban farm to increase its yield, reduce its water usage and become a gathering place for mutual aid and charging phones during a recent blackout. The Community Foundation’s grant will allow U-M and Family 1st Solar to create a guide that will help other urban farms replicate The Joy Project’s system.

Another recent Community Foundation grant will help Michigan Interfaith Power & Light create a model for partnering with places of worship to install solar energy systems and create similar climate-resilient community hubs.

The statewide sustainability nonprofit has partnered with Pastor Calvin Glass, at Lord of Lords Ministries on Detroit’s



A Community Foundation grant will help Michigan Interfaith Power & Light partner with Pastor Calvin Glass, at Lord of Lords Ministries in Detroit, to create a model for places of worship to establish solar community hubs.

east side, to implement the three-year grant from the Community Foundation’s Southeast Michigan Forever Fund. The endowed fund offers flexibility to support proof-of-concept projects, like this one, that can lead the way to solutions for our entire seven-county region.

Michigan Interfaith Power & Light Executive Director Leah Wiste says the Community Foundation’s forward-thinking, multiyear commitment to developing this solar funding and installation model, primarily for congregations of color, will allow the organization to dial in its approach and secure support from additional investors to expand the program in the future.

Glass, who holds a doctorate in ministry, says he hopes his church — as one of the first Black congregations in Detroit to implement solar energy — will inspire others to follow in its footsteps using the new Michigan Interfaith Power & Light process.

“My dream is that we are a model for smaller congregations and low-income congregations,” Glass says. “If we can have solar, you also can. You can fight for clean air, a clean environment. You can fight for justice. It can happen in the suburbs, but it also can happen in the city.” ■



Grant transforms anglers into ‘citizen scientists’

A recent Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan grant helped the Ecology Center in Ann Arbor engage citizens in collecting data on contamination in the Huron and Rouge River watersheds. Angler Antonio Rafael volunteered to assist with the project. “I’ve got a lot of Indigenous ancestry,” he says. “For me, fishing is more than a sport or recreational activity. It’s something that I do to build a relationship with the water and to find a more ethical source for my food.”

Clean, healthy water and air are key to our quality of life in southeast Michigan. Yet, many residents in our region live with pollution that can endanger their health.

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan has tapped its unrestricted endowment, known as the Southeast Michigan Forever Fund, to support studies that explore these ties between our environment and health. The results can help advocates pinpoint solutions and catalyze actions that will make our seven-county region a desirable place to live, work and play for everyone.

A recent grant to the Ecology Center, a nonprofit in Ann Arbor that works to ensure healthy people and a healthy planet, is an example. The Community Foundation awarded the organization \$100,000 over two years to educate “citizen scientists” on how to conduct testing for PFAS and other toxic chemicals. Once trained, these volunteers will conduct community-driven research on surface water, drinking water, air and wildlife throughout the Huron and Rouge River watersheds.

The Community Foundation grant was leveraged in collaboration with funding from partners including the

Wege Foundation, the Erb Family Foundation, the C.S. Mott Foundation and others.

“The Ecology Center’s long-term goals — that southeast Michigan communities are protected from hazardous chemicals, including PFAS, in their environment, and that impacted communities have greater agency and involvement over their community and ecological health outcomes — are important ones,” says Greg Yankee, director of Arts and Environmental Initiatives at the Community Foundation. “It seems that more is understood almost every month about the correlation between health outcomes and environmental factors.”

‘Forever chemicals’ in our water

PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals” or per- and polyfluoroalkyls, are man-made substances that have been used since the 1940s to manufacture nonstick cookware, water-repellent clothing, stain-resistant fabrics and carpets, food packaging and a variety of other products.

During production and use, they can migrate into the soil, air, water and wildlife. Scientific studies have shown that

exposure to PFAS may be linked to harmful health effects in humans and animals, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Those effects can include certain types of cancers, developmental and reproductive harm, immune system suppression, and less-effective vaccine responses, says Ecology Center Toxics Campaign Director Erica Bloom.

It's a global problem that requires collaboration between government at all levels, private industry, philanthropy, engaged citizens and advocacy organizations. While the chemicals can never be fully eradicated, they can be reduced through cleanup and prevention measures. In addition, identifying where the chemicals are concentrated can help guide outreach and education among anglers, as the Ecology Center project does, Bloom says.

"When we talk about contamination, you have to be sensitive that, for some people, it's not as easy as just, 'Stop fishing,'" she says, noting fishing can be an affordable, vital source of protein for some residents and a key component of cultural heritage among native communities.

"We don't tell people to completely stop fishing," Bloom says. "We tell people that they need to be aware. We give them the information and data so they can make choices for themselves about what they want to do with their health and their fish consumption."

Community Foundation grant supports testing

Antonio Rafael grew up fishing with his dad. The pair would take their small aluminum boat and fish for walleye on the scenic Straights of Lake Erie.

Rafael also grew up with asthma.

His family lived in southwest Detroit, in the shadow of oil refineries and steel mills, where industrial facilities that emit toxic chemicals sometimes border schools and senior centers. Rafael experienced firsthand the impact of pollution on his health.

Today, as an adult, he advocates for environmental justice and leads Black to the Land — a coalition of Black, Brown,



"To have citizens engaged in citizen science is a really important and special thing," says Antonio Rafael, who volunteered to test for PFAS and other toxic chemicals as part of the Ecology Center project. "A lot of times, the action of science is disconnected from communities who live and work and eat and fish in these areas. To have communities who are directly impacted participate in collecting data, it can touch more lives, make more people aware and be more justice-oriented."

and Indigenous nature enthusiasts who are intent on helping BIPOC people actively engage in meaningful outdoor experiences. He's also an avid gardener and fisherman, who recently volunteered as a community researcher in the Ecology Center's PFAS project funded, in part, by the Community Foundation.

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