



Berrien County Gives Back

BERRIEN

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

For Good. For Ever.™

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2024



Grant Challenge Supports Playground For All

Berrien Community Foundation will match community donations, dollar for dollar, up to \$50,000 to replace the aging Silver Beach playground equipment.

BCF launched the community challenge to help Berrien County acquire the local funds needed to secure an \$850,000 Michigan Department of Natural Resources Spark Grant to replace the existing play structure with a new and inclusive playground at Silver Beach County Park. The current playground was built in 1991 and needs to be replaced for safety.

The new playground will be accessible to children of all abilities with barrier-free access, and will feature innovative elements to encourage movement, spinning, and climbing. Additionally, it will offer tactile, visual and auditory experiences, structures with graduated levels of play, spots for sensory relief and shade canopies.

“The playground at Silver Beach County Park is such a popular destination for residents from all over Berrien County,” said Berrien Community Foundation President Lisa Cripps-Downey. “BCF is thrilled to offer this challenge grant so the entire community can get behind this project and build a playground that is more accessible for all kids and can last another 30 years.”

BCF is working with the county parks department



BCF staff take a break from the workday to show their support of replacing the playground equipment at Silver Beach County Park to create a more inclusive place.

to hold the fund for the project. The full playground is projected to cost \$1.25 million.

Donations to the project can be made online at www.berriencommunity.org/SilverBeachPlayground, sent to BCF at 2900 S. State Street, Suite 2E, St. Joseph, MI 49085, or through the Berrien County Parks Department.

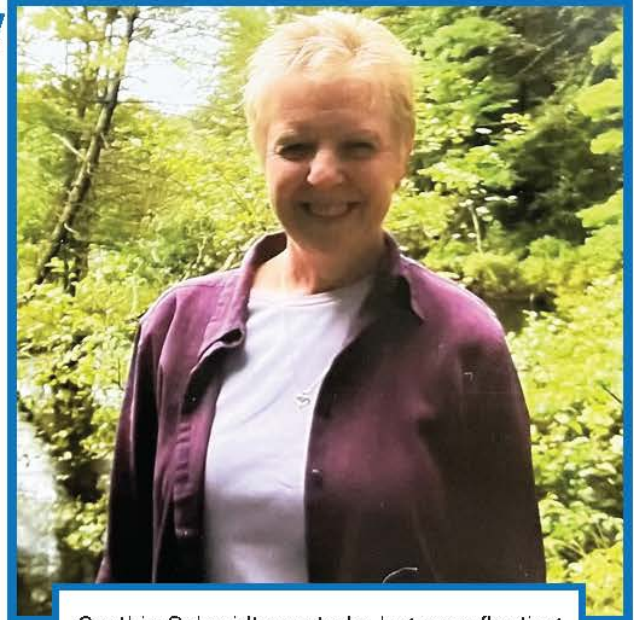
Creating a Lasting Legacy

Cynthia “Cindy” Schmidt was a teacher, a banking vice president, and an advertising agency executive. But what she wanted to be remembered for, along with being an amazing friend and fantastic dog mom, was caring for her community. That will be her legacy.

Cindy supported the causes she loved in the community during her lifetime and wanted to make sure she continued to do the same after her death with a life-end gift through the Berrien Community Foundation. She wanted to take care of children in the community and make sure pets had good homes. She wanted to help people facing the same illnesses that had affected her family and friends.

She said it wasn't easy to think about what happens after you die, but it felt good to know that the assets she worked hard for during her lifetime would continue to give back through the Cynthia J. Schmidt Endowment Fund. Her legacy, created her way.

Cancer claimed Cindy far too soon. However, her legacy lives on with annual gifts that will come



Cynthia Schmidt created a legacy reflecting what she cared about most.

from the **Cynthia J. Schmidt Endowment Fund**. Thank you, Cindy, for remembering your community.

Gotcha Doin' Good!



For about two years, **Fredia Armstrong** has made sleeping mats for the homeless in her spare time. She gathers plastic shopping bags and unused trash bags to create each mat, and will sometimes stuff the pockets with a hat and pair of gloves. She gives the mats away herself and has also given some to organizations that help people facing homelessness.



Amy Moffatt teaches the standard curriculum in her 4th grade classroom at North Elementary School in Watervliet. She also works to cultivate a sense of community, volunteerism and giving in her students. To give back, her students decided to put together dozens of Easter baskets for senior citizens at a local care facility to let them know they're thought of and loved.

Nominate Someone!

Gotcha' Doin' Good highlights people in our community who are making our corner of the world a better place. If you'd like to nominate someone for our **Gotcha' Doin' Good** spotlight feature, visit www.berriencommunity.org/gotchadoingood, email kellygampel@berriencommunity.org or give us a call at 269-983-3304.





Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grants

Watervliet Middle School teacher Kerry Wilson, center, with her Social Studies class. T.E.A.M. member McKaylen Laws made the announcement to the class in March.

A Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grant from Berrien Community Foundation is making sure all students can participate in a hands-on project - **The Economic Mall**. In the project, students research a country and learn about a product unique to that country. They then create that product to sell at the Economic Mall.

“Many students do not have the resources at home to create these projects, so I offer several days after school so students can stay,” Wilson said. “I try to have a variety of materials available for students to create a project they truly like.”

The Economic Mall takes place in the late fall leading up to the winter holidays. From the supplies

she gets, students can do a variety of creative craft projects. Students then shop at the Economic Mall using play money.

“Teachers are so innovative,” said BCF Program Director Susan Matheny. “The Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grants are a great way to reward that creative thought and support teachers.”

Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grants are awarded to teachers and school staff to support in-school or in-class projects that take an imaginative and innovative approach to learning. There are two grant cycles each year with a simple application available at www.berriencommunity.org. The next deadline to apply is September 15.

T.E.A.M. Happenings

Teens Exhibiting Able Minds (T.E.A.M.) members visited The Readiness Center in Benton Harbor to learn how they prepare children for kindergarten and help families break the cycle of poverty. T.E.A.M. is the youth advisory committee for Berrien Community Foundation. After getting a tour, T.E.A.M. helped assemble baskets for the kids' Easter egg hunt.

The group also reviews and awards **Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grant** applications from teachers and school employees from across the county. The teens use their experience to help select grants they think will have the most impact in the classroom.

T.E.A.M is made up of 8th-12th grade students from schools all over Berrien County who want to have an impact on youth-related issues in their communities.



BCF For Good Grants - Planting Knowledge

A **BCF For Good Grant** will help turn a portion of Fernwood Botanical Gardens in Niles into a space unique to Berrien County – a stumpery garden.

Stumperies consist of tree stumps arranged upside down or on their sides to show their root structures. These gardens create unique environments where shade-loving plants thrive because there are loads of nooks and crannies where plants and animals can live within the root system of the fallen trees.

Fernwood staff envisions field trips from area schools where students walk down paths of moss- and lichen-covered stumps while learning about the lush environment that attracts all kinds of insects and toads and is the perfect place for fungi, rare ferns and hostas to grow.



Pictured is Fernwood's Executive Director Carol Line, director of horticulture Dave Halvax and Board of Trustees co-chair Tracy Dippo.

“That space is becoming what it was always meant to be,” said Fernwood Director of Marketing & Community Engagement Elaine Rowland.



Pictured is Mary Harrison, Library Director, Jamie Balkin, TEAM Member, Alicia Ford, Assistant Library Director

The Coloma Library needed help to create a space just for teens. A **BCF For Good Grant** will rework current shelving, purchase new teen-friendly furniture, add better signage, and introduce a teen games collection. Funds will also be used to modernize the teen book collections, and create a place to post information on teen-specific resources in our area.

The library's goal is to create a more comfortable, inclusive, and inviting space in the library that is truly utilized by teens. To make sure they get it right, the library is involving area teens in the entire process from planning to successful completion.

Upcoming Grant Deadlines

Alamar Nonprofit Sustainability Grant letters of intent — May 1

Stephen E. Upton Love Your Community Grant — June 1

Frederick S. Upton Foundation Grants — June 15

Carolyn's Kids — July 1

visit www.berriencommunity.org/grants to apply

Save The Date!

June 13

Scholarship Celebration

September 18

Annual Meeting