

Donors to Foundation Funds

As we see year after year, our community's spirit of generosity and belief in itself is reflected in giving to The Foundation. And in 2020, as our community was in the midst of crisis, donors again showed that spirit and contributed more than \$22 million in new gifts and transfers.

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* as of December 31, 2020



Photo credit: Miles H. Alderman

The Urban Resources Initiative Legacy Fund

Est. 2020 by Lauren and Ben Heruska and Christopher Ozyck.

The Urban Resources Initiative Legacy Fund was established to sustain the organization responsible for New Haven’s trees and community greenspaces. Trees have always been central to the identity of New Haven, renowned from its early days as the The Elm City for the spectacular canopy that once arched over its downtown streets and central green. While disease wiped out elms during the last century, an impressive inventory of maples, lindens, oaks, ash, sycamores, and various other species give neighborhoods shady comfort and a sense of place throughout present-day New Haven.

Urban Resources Initiative (URI) is the principal steward responsible for the monumental task of replenishing this urban forest, and for the spread of community greenspaces lending natural beauty and building neighborhood bonds throughout the city. In doing its work, URI partners with resident volunteers and offers paid green job training to adults and teenagers in need of opportunities.

“Ultimately, we are trying to connect people with nature in the urban environment,” said Associate Director for URI and fund Co-founder, Chris Ozyck. “It’s so important to have the stability of funding to keep the operations running. A lot of funding opportunities want new projects. Day-to-day dollars are harder to find.”

URI now provides technical assistance to 50 volunteer groups around the city, each maintaining a little urban oasis. The gardens and pocket parks are a nexus for people to come together, strengthening the bonds that make communities hospitable and safe.

Maintaining the urban forest requires a constant replacing of trees lost to age, sickness and the saws of utility companies. To keep the city at replacement levels, URI, in partnership with the City of New Haven, plants up to 1,000 trees annually with planting teams of high school students and adults who also have a history of incarceration. The teams are paid and individuals learn forestry and landscaping skills that build their resumes for quality employment opportunities.



Photo credit: Urban Resources Initiative

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Jonathan Gorham Sustainability Fund for the benefit of Massaro Community Farm

Est. 2020 by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, co-founders and co-directors of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, established the Jonathan Gorham Sustainability Fund in recognition of Gorham’s more than 45-year effort to bring renewable energy and ecofriendly land use practices to fruition in the region.

“We are pleased to honor the remarkable work that Jon Gorham has done to found and grow Massaro Farm,” said Tucker and Grim. “Jon’s leadership is extraordinary — combining intellectual, organizational and people skills. He has helped to create both a farm and a community that is a beacon of hope.”

The designated fund will support Massaro Community Farm (MCF) and the initiatives in the community that MCF has undertaken. The Fund’s purpose is to increase the awareness and promotion of the use of renewable energy technologies, sustainable agricultural practices, local food production, sustainable living practices and the educational programs that explain their benefit. The fund will also support the restoration of abandoned farms in the region.

Historically, MCF has donated at least 10% of its harvest to the Connecticut Food Bank and other organizations supporting the food insecure. In 2020 MCF donated over 8,500 pounds of fresh produce, well beyond that benchmark. When the pandemic first struck in March 2020 the MCF team pivoted from its normal planting preparation. Instead, it set up a COVID-safe, production routine and curb-side pickup system. MCF also established an on-line store which provided a way for regional small farmers to sell their eggs, dairy and other goods. MCF kept the locally produced food flowing to our region. Because of these positive results, the number of Massaro Community Supported Agriculture subscribers increased by over 33%.




Photo credit: Massaro Community Farm/Jonathan Gorham

Youth Impact Charitable Fund

Est. 2020 by The Verge Awards® for Teens on the Verge of Greatness!

Years of planning were leading up to April 2020 when the Verge Awards® for Teens on the Verge of Greatness! would hold its first (free) festival at the Toyota Oakdale Theatre, with Grammy-nominated artist Hunter Hayes volunteering to be part of the celebration.

Linda Neaton, founder and CEO of the Verge Awards, had the enthusiastic support of the Commissioner of Education and Live Nation. Then the pandemic hit. There would be no live performances in front of large audiences.

Stages darkened and high school and community musicals, concerts, art exhibitions and athletic events were canceled; and the very places where teens “discover their passions and find their people” were suddenly unavailable.

So, Neaton pivoted. She reimagined the Verge Awards as a virtual festival where all kinds of teens could showcase their talents. “I saw how necessary this was,” Neaton said. “We want teens to hear that applause and feel the encouragement, even though it’s virtual.”

Teens from around the country can upload a performance, artwork, invention, writing, fashion designs and more for display in the Festival’s virtual venues throughout the summer. They can participate just for the fun of it, or opt-in for adjudication and public voting to win a Verge Award, be discovered by college and other talent recruiters, or be featured in “Teens on the Verge” benefit variety shows.

Students can also be part of the Verge Award’s Creative Force for Good, using their creative, STEM or advocacy skills to support coronavirus relief and racial equality, combat poverty and climate change, promote education and animal welfare, and more.

In 2020, Neaton created the Youth Impact Charitable Fund at The Foundation to celebrate and support the dreams of young creators, innovators, athletes and changemakers and empower them to use their passions to achieve positive impact in this world.



Image credit: Youth Impact Charitable Fund/Linda Neaton

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Scholarship Fund for Courage, Opportunity, Vitality Innovation, and Drive

Est. 2020 by Mareshah White.

A \$15,000 contribution from AT&T helped establish a scholarship fund in 2020 to benefit Hamden High School students impacted by the COVID pandemic.

The scholarship program was conceived by Mareshah White to have have an immediate impact by providing assistance to graduating Hamden seniors so they could offset some of the costs of pursuing a college education.

“I am not surprised that, when we asked, AT&T immediately stepped up to help launch it. AT&T has always been a terrific partner for the town and its students, most recently providing expanded free wifi for remote learning and now helping graduating seniors go to college,” said State Representative Michael D’Agostino when the fund was established.

White recognized that high school seniors had forgone many normalcies during the pandemic, including proms, graduation ceremonies, and now summer employment that many young people rely on to support their post-secondary education goals.

White connected with The Community Foundation *for* Greater New Haven, who helped her create the Scholarship Fund for Courage, Opportunity, Vitality Innovation, and Drive. AT&T donated the initial \$15,000 to launch the scholarship. They determined the scholarship funding would be divided among 150 Hamden High graduating seniors, who were chosen through an application and review process. The application included an opportunity to demonstrate the impact COVID has had on their continuing education as well as how the funds will make a meaningful impact.

“AT&T aims to identify programs that are making real differences in the lives of local students, and this scholarship program is a unique and innovative example,” said John Emra, president, AT&T Connecticut. “Ms. White’s creativity and determination is inspirational. Along with the Community Foundation, they are impacting a great number of young people with small kindnesses and bringing helpful resources to those who need them most. The effort to prepare and support students in pursuit of their college goals is critical, especially during the COVID pandemic, and we are very proud to offer our support.”



Photo provided by the White Family

Richard T. Wright Fund

Est. 2020 by Richard T. Wright.

Richard Treat Wright loved the natural world and taking hikes around all the fields and streams and nooks and crannies of his beloved town of Orange.

“He led seniors on hikes,” said Henry T. Petry CLU, ChFC, Richard’s financial advisor and friend. “He liked sharing the outdoors with others.”

So much so, that he left a major bequest to The Community Foundation to establish the Richard T. Wright Fund. Included in that amount were outright gifts to local organizations he cared deeply about. But the majority of the Fund establishes an endowment to be used by the Orange Land Trust to maintain and preserve open space in the town so that everyone in the community has the chance to enjoy nature and by the town of Orange for the maintenance and preservation of land off Old Grassy Hill Road and Wright’s Pond where Richard skated as a boy. The property once belonged to Wright and his brothers, Stanley and Thomas Wright.

Richard worked for the state of Connecticut’s department of Income Maintenance for much of his life. “He lived very frugally,” Petry said, and his investments grew over time. In his later years he donated about \$10,000 annually to charities. “He always cared about giving,” and his wish was to create a Fund with The Community Foundation.

Though he lived simply, Petry said, Wright’s interests were wide ranging: ballroom dancing, local history and spending time with his nieces and nephew. After retirement, Wright could be found working at the Orange Town Pool, volunteering with the Connecticut Food Bank, gardening and exploring paths familiar or new.

“The town of Orange and the open spaces there meant a great deal to Richard,” Petry recalled.



Photo credit: Henry T. Petry

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