

Legacy *Matters*



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Smart Investment

A New Era of Engagement: VCF's Board Advisory Council Embraces Valleyness and the Valley's Future

VALLEYNESS™

Valleyness is a word used to express the Valley's unique essence. It's a word that captures the neighborly, kind, caring spirit, and rich history ingrained in Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton. Valleyness encompasses a set of values, characteristics, and actions that traditionally define the Valley community and its people. Valleyness is the embodiment of positive and good qualities, actions, and deeds, that create a strong and vibrant community that cares for its members and works together to build a better future.



The Valley Community Foundation's newly reimagined Board Advisory Council (BAC) launched this fall with energy, clarity, and a renewed sense of purpose—marking a significant milestone in VCF's long-term strategy to build community, strengthen civic leadership, and intentionally carry the Valley's identity forward for the next generation.

More than 50 people gathered at Paradise Restaurant in Ansonia for the Council's October reception, an evening that quickly became a powerful affirmation of VCF's new direction for volunteer leadership. The room buzzed with spirited conversation, renewed connections, and a shared excitement about what the updated BAC structure means—not only for VCF, but for the Valley itself.

"This is the beginning of something meaningful, not just for VCF, but for the whole community," said Sharon Closius, President and CEO of VCF. "Tonight, you're not just volunteers. You are partners in shaping the Valley's future."

Historically, BAC members served primarily as ambassadors—supporting events, attending programs, and helping spread awareness as VCF grew its reach and impact. But as Closius explained, VCF's new strategic plan called for something deeper, more intentional, and more responsive to today's Valley.

At the direction of VCF's Board of Directors, the BAC's mission and responsibilities were intentionally reshaped to help strengthen, promote, and pass on "Valleyness"—the unique spirit that has long defined the region. With new residents moving into the Valley and younger generations shaping its future, the Board recognized that Valleyness must be actively cultivated, modeled, and shared if the Valley is to maintain its independent and special identity.

"We know the Valley's strength has always been its people," Closius said.

"The relationships, the shared history, the willingness to step up—those qualities are what we call Valleyness. Our Board asked us to be more deliberate about protecting and passing that on. The new BAC is a big part of that."

Valleyness is the neighborly, kind, and caring spirit ingrained in Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton. It reflects the Valley's rich history, its sense of responsibility to one another, and the collective belief that community is built through positive actions, shared values, and people working together for the common good.

"Valleyness is a defining strength which is unique to our Valley Communities. The common theme being woven is a rich history of neighbors helping neighbors. This must be intentionally nurtured through connections and shared experiences," said Sandra Arburr, VCF's Grants and Nonprofits Support Manager.

"Through purposeful community engagement, the BAC Pathways will offer meaningful opportunities to cultivate and spread community spirit in ways that are both authentic and enduring."

To support this renewed mission, the BAC was reorganized into focused Pathways, each aligned with VCF's strategic priorities and designed to give members clear, meaningful ways to contribute their time and expertise.

The BAC Pathways are:

First Responders -- Supporting local fire, police, and EMS organizations through building community, volunteerism, and strengthening relationships with those who protect and serve the Valley every day.

Equity -- Promoting inclusion, opportunity, and fairness across Valley life, and helping ensure that all residents have the chance to thrive.

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Youth & Family -- Strengthening the backbone of the Valley by supporting youth development and family vitality and stability.

Generations (Next Gen) -- Celebrating the Valley’s legacy while building connections across age groups, supporting aging-in-place, and encouraging younger residents to carry Valleyness forward.

In addition to Pathways, BAC members may also serve on two key Board committees:

Community Grants Committee, where members act as community reviewers for VCF’s competitive grants programs, gaining firsthand insight into local nonprofit impact.

Development Committee, supporting donor outreach, events, and initiatives such as 25 for the Next 25, VCF’s multi-year endowment campaign.

While VCF’s Board of Directors maintains fiduciary oversight and

governance, the BAC serves as a vital community-based partner—listening, convening, advising, and keeping VCF closely connected to the people it serves.

“Our Board makes decisions based on strong data and insight,” Closius noted. “But none of that matters without deep community connection. You—our BAC—are that connection.”

The enthusiasm at the reception made it clear that the Valley is ready. Attendees eagerly signed up for Pathways, expressing appreciation for being invited to contribute in a more meaningful way. Many shared that the focus on Valleyness resonated deeply—and felt especially important as the Valley evolves.

Through their Pathways and committee work, BAC members will help elevate community voices, strengthen cross-sector relationships, support nonprofits, advance philanthropy, and cultivate the next generation of Valley leadership.

“This Council is a place where ideas grow, people feel heard, and the Valley’s strengths shine,” Closius said in closing. “You’re helping us dream bigger—and helping us stay grounded in what makes this place special.”

The launch of the new Board Advisory Council marks more than a structural change. It represents a strategic investment in community, leadership, and the enduring spirit of Valleyness—ensuring the Valley remains strong, connected, and uniquely itself for generations to come.

To learn more about the Board Advisory Council or how to get involved, email Beth Colette at bcolette@valleyfoundation.org.

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Featured Fund

The Valley Foundation Fund — A Vision Realized...A Future Taking Shape

More than forty years ago, a group of Valley leaders sketched a vision for something that did not



yet exist—but believed with certainty one day would. They imagined a Valley with its own community foundation, grounded in local governance, local generosity, and the unmistakable spirit of “Valleyness” that connects Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton. That blueprint for the future began in 1979 with the creation of the Valley Fund, later renamed The Valley Foundation Fund.

The idea emerged from the Valley Chamber of Commerce’s Foundation Feasibility Committee, led by the late William E. Hoblitzelle III. This forward-looking group recognized two essential truths—first, that the Valley needed a philanthropic vehicle dedicated to its own residents, and second, that while The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (CFGNH) could provide a strong administrative home, true stewardship should -- and eventually would -- rest in the Valley itself.

That dream took a tangible step forward on July 31, 1980, when prominent Valley business leader Henry “Harry” W. Bassett made the fund’s inaugural contribution. Bassett and his Chamber colleagues believed

passionately in creating something that would outlast them -- something that could grow, evolve, and ultimately be stewarded by a Valley-run foundation.

Nearly a quarter-century later, in 2004, that hope was fulfilled. With the help of dedicated Valley philanthropists, business leaders, and CFGNH, the Valley Community Foundation (VCF) was established. Now, another milestone has arrived.

As VCF prepares to launch its bold multi-year endowment effort, “25 for the Next 25,” the Valley Foundation Fund has truly come home.

The fund’s legacy -- rooted in Valley history and born from Valley vision -- should serve as a cornerstone of the campaign. CFGNH matched the fund’s existing balance and gifted those dollars to VCF, where they were placed into a newly established VCF Valley Foundation Fund. This renewed fund will serve as one of the central repositories for endowment gifts raised through the campaign and, in the years ahead, will be used to strengthen the Valley through community building, civic engagement, leadership development, and initiatives that foster connection and capacity across the region.

“This is a full-circle moment,” said Bill Purcell, President and CEO of the Valley Chamber of Commerce. “When the Chamber and Harry Bassett established the fund in 1980, the hope was always that one day it would grow into something that could truly benefit

the entire Valley. Seeing it come to life now as part of this grand endowment campaign is both exciting and deeply meaningful for everyone involved in the original effort. It’s a wonderful way to honor our past while building for the future.”

Importantly, the Bassett family’s connection to the fund -- and to the Valley -- remains strong across generations. William “Bill” Bassett, Harry Bassett’s nephew, who took over leadership of the TRIM company when Harry retired, passed away recently. In a powerful gesture of continuity and community spirit, the Bassett family requested that, in lieu of flowers or gifts, donations in Bill’s memory be made to VCF’s new Valley Foundation Fund. That decision not only underscored the enduring bond between two generations of the Bassett family and the Valley they cared so deeply about, but it also generated thousands of dollars for the fund -- resources that will now be used to build leadership and strengthen community across the Valley for years to come.

“This is the home where Harry Bassett and the early Chamber leaders always hoped the Valley Foundation Fund would be,” said Sharon Closius, President and CEO of the Valley Community Foundation. “Their vision wasn’t simply to create a fund -- it was to create a spark and a place for the Valley to invest in itself. Establishing the new Valley Foundation Fund under VCF’s stewardship honors that intention and positions us to meet the needs of the next generation.”



Planned Giving

The Valley Community Foundation (VCF) welcomes **Mark and Gwen Goumas; Terry and Jean Jones; Aleta Miner; David Rivera; and Nancy Valentine** to The Gates Society, VCF’s planned giving community. Your planned gift will impact the charities and causes you’re passionate about forever, regardless of the amount.

Call us at 203-751-9162 or learn more at ValleyFoundation.org

Community Investment

VCF Launches Valley Professional Advisors Network After Standout Inaugural Gathering



What began as a vision to strengthen collaboration among the Lower Naugatuck Valley's professional advisors officially took shape in December with the Valley Community Foundation's (VCF) inaugural Valley Professional Advisors Network dinner at Il Palio Restaurant in Shelton.

By every measure, the invitation-only gathering was a resounding success, said VCF staff and Board members.

The evening brought together a wide cross-section of trusted local advisors who serve clients in the Valley region, including financial, legal and estate planning professionals, as well as CPAs, attorneys, funeral directors, and other trusted professionals who play a critical role in helping individuals and families plan for the future. Throughout the night, guests engaged in lively, thoughtful conversations about the shared challenges and opportunities they encounter in their work -- and the growing need for a Valley-based professional network.

Many of the attendees said modern communication tools, like cell phones, online meetings and training

programs, have made face-to-face networking less frequent and in fact almost nonexistent in the Valley in their fields.

"Nights like this remind you why community matters," said Attorney Greg Pepe, a VCF Board Member, who served as co-host at the event. "Advisors who might not otherwise cross paths were sitting together, talking shop, sharing ideas, and all agreeing on one thing -- that a Valley-based professional advisor network is long overdue."

During the dinner, VCF organizers of the event said the foundation recognized a longstanding gap in the region -- while many professional advisors serve Valley clients, there has never been a formal, coordinated way for those professionals to connect, learn from one another, and collaborate locally. In response, VCF offered to help facilitate the creation of the new network.

"Part of our strategic plan says that we need to act as conveners, to foster collaboration and community building," said Sharon Closius, VCF's President and CEO. "Creating this network does just that. These professional advisors do so much to serve and protect Valley residents' estate planning and future wishes."

The new network will be structured around three flexible levels of participation:

- Strategic Partners (Ambassadors):** Seasoned advisors who will help promote the network, mentor younger professionals.

- The Core Council:** A smaller working group that will help shape programming, identify priorities, and plan future initiatives beginning in 2026 and beyond.

- Professional Advisors Network:** A group open to any advisor serving clients in the Valley who wants to stay connected, receive updates, attend events, and access shared resources.

Throughout the evening, advisors expressed strong interest in participating at various levels and praised the opportunity to bring the professional community together in a new way.

"This network benefits everyone," said Bevon McLean, a VCF Board member, and Valley-based attorney and co-host of the event. "It strengthens advisors, their firms, and most importantly, the clients and families they serve right here in the Valley."

VCF will begin next steps early in the new year by inviting additional advisors to participate and helping to formally launch the Valley Professional Advisors Network in the coming year.

Editor's note: If you are a professional advisor and would like to be part of the Valley Professional Advisors Network, contact VCF by calling 203-751-9162, or email Beth Colette at: bcolette@valleyfoundation.org





Good News About the Valley

Learning Together: A Community Conversation on Aging in The Valley

Aging in place can feel overwhelming -- but for Valley residents who attended the Valley Community Foundation's (VCF) latest Community Learning Session, it became clearer, more manageable, and far less isolating. Participants walked away with practical tools, trusted local resources, and a renewed understanding that growing older in the Valley does not have to mean navigating challenges alone.

Dozens of area residents filled the Seymour Community Center on November 16th, 2025, for the VCF's latest Community Learning Session -- a robust, information-based gathering focused on providing Valley residents ideas and resources to empower older adults to age in place safely, affordably, and with dignity. The strong turnout, the engaging discussion, and the enthusiastic feedback reinforced a simple idea: when people have access to trusted information from local experts -- and a welcoming space to ask real questions -- communities become stronger and more connected.

After refreshments and neighbor-to-neighbor conversations, the event transitioned into a dynamic panel presentation featuring Mary McNelis, Director of Seymour's Community and Senior Center; David Morgan, TEAM's President & CEO; and Jessica Kristy and Lisa Trupp from the Naugatuck Valley Health District. Moderated by VCF's Grants

& Nonprofit Support Manager, Sandra Arburr, the panel explored some of the challenges older adults often face while aging in place -- transportation, access to healthcare, home safety, food security and social isolation -- and highlighted many organizations that provide community-based resources and services for those who are aging in place throughout the Valley.

"One of the most important takeaways of offering community learning session such as this is shining the light on the many resources available within our communities to assist our older adults navigating through aging in place and the importance of the connections," Arburr said.

The attendees learned about programs such as energy assistance, Meals on Wheels, the senior meals options program at Griffin Hospital (SMOP) which provides nutritious evening meals at Griffin Hospital five days a week," Arburr said.

"These meals also serve as a vital opportunity for seniors to connect, reducing the risks of isolation and loneliness," Arburr said. "Socialization is an important part of maintaining emotional and mental well-being, and this program fosters community engagement among participants."

The presentations were factual and informational, which included the panelists stressing the importance of being connected in your community and the risks

that come along with social isolation. The panelists responded to dozens of audience questions, shared practical resources, and emphasized the importance of coordinated support between nonprofits, municipalities, community and health partners, and caregivers.

"We're stronger when we share knowledge," Morgan said. "Aging in place isn't just a policy issue -- it's a family issue, a neighborhood issue, a community issue."

The session was recorded and will air on local cable throughout January, allowing more residents to access the information and resources discussed.

VCF's Community Learning Sessions are a key part of its ongoing commitment to Valleyness -- creating informed, connected communities that care for one another. VCF expects to host additional Learning Sessions in 2026 on topics shaped by resident input and community needs.

"We want every session to spark curiosity and empower people with real, practical knowledge," Arburr said. "If we keep learning together, we will keep building a stronger Valley."

If you have an idea for a community learning session topic, please let us know and email Sandra Arburr at saburr@valleyfoundation.org.