

History

Thanks to the persistence of insurance salesman Joe U. Posner and several other community-minded individuals, the Greater Rochester Community Foundation of the Genesee Valley was incorporated on September 18, 1972, and was overseen by a 21-member volunteer board. Here are highlights of the Foundation's work and growth:

1970 to 1979

1972: First office was located at 315 Alexander Street.

1973: **Nancy Dillman Peck**, the first executive director was hired on a part-time basis. The fledgling foundation received its first gifts totaling \$67,960, with most coming from a gift of Rite Aid Corp. stock.

1974: Name was shortened to Rochester Area Foundation.

1976: First fund was established.

1977: **Linda Shapiro Weinstein** was hired as the organization's second executive director, but she was full time.

1979: By the end of this year, the Foundation accumulated \$1 million in assets.

1980 to 1989

1982: The very first "An Evening Out At Home" gala was held in 11 homes with just more than 100 guests and a dessert reception at the Academy of Medicine on East Avenue.

1984: The first field of interest funds were created, including the Community Arts Endowment, and the board of directors was led by its first-ever female chair, **Malinda Fischer**.

1986: **Jim Littwitz** established the Nonprofits Advisory Service, which helped to increase organizational efficiency, strengthen skills of boards and staffs, and create long-range planning

and goal-setting.

1987: A Community Leadership grant from the Ford Foundation helped to launch the Early Childhood Education Initiative (later known as [ECDI](#)) and the Greater Rochester Women's Fund was established.

1989: The Foundation reached \$20 million in assets with gifts from the sales of Lawyer's Co-Op and Champion Products. The John F. Wegman Foundation was transferred to the Foundation into the John F. Wegman Fund.

1990 to 1999

1990: [Rochester's Child](#) was formed. Also started current investment portfolio; 9.1% average annual earnings (net of fees).

1991: The first community Philanthropy Awards luncheon was held and **Richard F. Brush** was the inaugural honoree.

1992: **Ruth H. Scott** became the first African American board chair.

1993: [Jennifer Leonard](#) was hired as the third executive director to lead the organization (currently holding the titles of president and CEO). The Foundation wanted to help city neighborhoods and established the NeighborGood grant program to award smaller grants for block parties, beautification projects and more.**1994:** When the larger arts organizations got into severe financial trouble, the Foundation led a community-wide fundraising campaign called "Arts Tomorrow" to raise money for Geva, the RPO, and Garth Fagan Dance. **Joe U. Posner** helped create Quad A for Kids.

1997: Outgrowing office space in the Triangle Building at 335 E. Main Street, the Foundation purchased the historic home at 500 East Avenue that was built by William Ellwanger. The organization's official name also changed to Rochester Area Community Foundation. Three new initiatives were started – Caring for Creeks; WILLpower collaborative; and Common Good Planning Center.

1999: The Foundation continued to grow and reached \$100 million in assets.

2000 to 2009

2000: A Social Capital Benchmark Survey was conducted (and then repeated in 2006) and discovered that interpersonal trust in our community suffered from deep disparities correlated with race and ethnicity.

2001: Ron and Donna Fielding make a record \$14 million gift to the Foundation, but anonymously. They were publicly named as the mysterious contributors, but not until the 2012 Annual Lunch. The Foundation also helped to establish the Greater Rochester After-School Alliance ([GRASA](#)).

2004: A multi-year planning process initiated by the Community Foundation resulted in the creation of [The Children's Agenda](#).

2005: Margaret Sánchez became the first Latina chair of the board. Under her leadership a strategic plan changed the focus to community and the donors who care about it.

2007: Rebranded as the Community Foundation with a new logo, although the legal name remained Rochester Area Community Foundation. The [Rochester Women's Giving Circle](#) was created.

2008: [NextGen Rochester](#), a giving circle for young professionals, was started with help from three Foundation staff members.

2009: With support from United Way of Greater Rochester, the Foundation launched a community indicators project and website of data called [ACT Rochester](#). With a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies, the Foundation worked with many community partners to establish Boomer Mentors, which matched Baby Boomers with students in need of mentoring.

2011 to present

2011: The Foundation expanded its service area from six

counties to eight, adding Seneca and [Yates](#) counties. Two new giving circles were formed – the [African American Giving Initiative](#) and the [LGBT Giving Circle](#).

2012: During the Foundation's 40th anniversary year, the assets reach \$250 million and distributed a cumulative total of \$300 million in grants and scholarships since its founding.

2013: With a \$200,000 grant from the Foundation, the Rochester Museum & Science Center brought the exhibit, *RACE: Are We So Different?* here for three months.

- To continue conversations on race prompted by the exhibit, Facing Race, Embracing Equity (FR=EE) was started.
- The African American Giving Initiative published the *State of Black Rochester 2013* book.
- In December, the Foundation and ACT Rochester released a shocking report detailing [poverty and the concentration of poverty](#) in the nine-county region.

2014: Introduced [new grantmaking framework](#) with two main goals – “Creating an Equitable Community” and “Strengthening Our Regional Vitality” – and an emphasis on fewer, larger, and more impactful grants.

- With help from concerned citizens, [Dialogues Without Borders](#) was launched for suburban citizens to gather informally and learn more about what is happening in the city.
- When flooding devastated many parts of Yates County, our Yates Community Endowment set up a disaster relief fund and raised nearly \$180,000 to help neighbors in need.
- The [Developmental Disabilities Giving Circle](#) was formed by a group of parents, siblings and advocates. It is the Foundation's fifth grassroots giving group.

- At the request of the Rochester City School District, the Foundation convened a Community Task Force on School Climate to develop plans for improving the learning and teaching environment in city schools.

2015: In January, a [follow-up poverty report](#) benchmarked Rochester's poverty with that of 17 other similar-sized communities – and the news was worse.

- The [Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative](#) was started and organizers made sure to include perspectives of people living in poverty.
- Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced creation of the Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force, comprised of cabinet-level representatives from 20 state agencies to support the work of the local task force.
- A package of five grants totaling \$465,000 kicked off a comprehensive effort to evaluate and improve out-of-school-time programs for city youth. This investment is one of the two largest, multi-faceted grant programs in the Foundation's history. These grants were part of the Foundation's [largest-ever quarterly grant distribution](#) of \$1.3 million.
- Foundation assets reached \$328 million.
- The foundation created by Buffalo Bills founder **Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.** [awarded \\$525,000](#) to the Community Foundation to create a fund to find, analyze, and share data.
- The Foundation received the [largest gift in its history](#) – \$61 million – from the **Sands family**, known for building Constellation Brands, Inc. into a leading beer, wine and spirits company. The gift established the Sands Family Supporting Foundation at the Community Foundation.

2016: The Community Task Force on School Climate, convened by the Foundation, established a new code of conduct for the Rochester City School District that won board approval. The group also recommended anti-racist training to better define, understand, and address the impact of racism and cultural bias in the schools.

- In June, the Foundation's five giving circles celebrated the collective distribution of more than \$1 million in grants since 2008.
- The Yates Community Endowment met its goal to raise \$1 million in permanent endowment to support Yates County.
- The Foundation introduced City of Rochester officials with Mike Ingham, a donor and entrepreneur who was volunteering with Kiva, an international, internet-based platform that connects small businesses with crowd-sourced microloans to help alleviate poverty. Kiva Rochester was launched in August to help create or grow local businesses.
- ACT Rochester and the Foundation collaborated on a third report that looked at [poverty and self-sufficiency](#) and found that poverty continues to grow throughout the region.

2017: With a \$5 million gift, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation created the [Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Youth Sports](#) at the Community Foundation.

- In partnership with the Wilson Foundation and Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program, a ["State of Play"](#) report was released that offered an independent assessment of the state of youth sports and recreation in our six-county Finger Lakes region. A local task force is assisting the Foundation in determining the

scope of the grantmaking, starting in the Fall.

- The 10-year-old Rochester Women's Giving Circle surpassed the \$1 million mark in its grantmaking with the June distribution of \$175,300 in grants.
- In August, ACT Rochester and the Community Foundation released the report, ["Hard Facts: Race and Ethnicity in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area,"](#) which found we are lagging behind the state and the country.
- At the September Annual Lunch, the Foundation marked its 45th anniversary.

2018: We awarded \$329,000 in grants to support [20 youth sports projects](#) in the first grant round of the [Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Youth Sports](#). These grants will directly impact more than 6,500 youth in four counties. The interest in this grant round was impressive, with 82 applications requesting a total of \$1.5 million.

- Foundation staff completed participation in structural racism workshops involving 28 other local nonprofit organizations that was launched by St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center. An internal team was formed to review Foundation practices, policies and procedures.
- The 21st Century Club got a new name – Catalysts for Change – and will recognize donors who make cumulative gifts of \$10,000 or more earmarked for unrestricted endowment to address the pressing needs of today, tomorrow, and into the future.