

The Community Foundation Receives \$5 Million for Youth Sports

The foundation created by the late Buffalo Bills founder Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. has awarded \$5 million to Rochester Area Community Foundation to expand and improve opportunities for youth sports and recreation programs in the greater Rochester region.

This gift established the **Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Youth Sports**, which will provide annual and ongoing grants to support current and new youth sports programs run by local communities or organizations and to make them more accessible to all youth. An additional gift of \$250,000 was included to allow the Community Foundation to have a substantial first grant round later this year.

“We are honored to build on Mr. Wilson’s lifelong love of sports by helping our region’s young athletes and those participating in local recreation programs enjoy quality programs in their own communities and learn from knowledgeable, well-trained coaches and adult organizers,” says Jennifer Leonard, president and CEO of the Community Foundation.

“By establishing this endowed fund at the Community Foundation, it allows us to permanently support very localized projects in the region for which a smaller grant can make all the difference,” says David Egner, president and CEO of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “In addition, while we

continue to seek out opportunities to invest in broader youth sports and recreation programs, this fund will provide an opportunity to test out ideas and programs on a smaller, pilot level.”

A Youth Sports Task Force for the Rochester Region, comprised of more than three dozen representatives from organizations involved in youth play and sports in Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates counties, has been meeting since last summer. Its main purpose is to provide input on local priorities and needs related to youth sports and low-income youth participation in sports programs.

“Many youth sports programs in our region are held together heroically on a shoestring budget and this new fund can help provide stability and enhance what is being offered,” says Hank Rubin, vice president for community programs at the Community Foundation, who convened the task force. “This all-local task force has been instrumental in helping us to better understand the youth sports and play landscape and establish a common understanding of what constitutes quality.”

For this effort, youth sports is being defined as formal sports teams that are part of out-of-school-time programs (before and after school, expanded learning, and summer enrichment); sports and recreation within local school districts; general recreational activities and facilities; and organized community programs that offer sports for youth up to age 18 as part of their overall offerings.

The Community Foundation and the Michigan-based Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation have partnered with the Aspen Institute to study existing youth sports opportunities in Livingston,

Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates counties and highlight where the gaps exist. The Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program, based in Washington, D.C., tracks and reports on the state of youth sports nationally. The youth sports task force members provided valuable input to Aspen researchers on what is happening in our communities and in their youth sports programs.

Aspen's study, to be released this summer, will help focus the Community Foundation's grantmaking investments from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Youth Sports. The overarching goal is to strengthen the quality, quantity, and accessibility of youth sports programs in the region. Also, an expanded task force will assist Community Foundation staff to identify areas of focus and strategies for grantmaking in youth sports and recreation activities for children under age 18 in our region.

The Community Foundation expects to launch its youth sports grant opportunities in Fall 2017.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr., a native of Detroit, considered Western New York his adopted hometown because of his passion for the Buffalo Bills football team, which he founded in 1959. The foundation established after Wilson's death in March 2014 is concentrating its investments in Southeast Michigan and Western New York, which includes greater Rochester. The Wilson Foundation focuses its efforts on four key areas: children and youth; young adults and working class families; caregiving; and healthy communities. Funds for youth sports already were established in Buffalo and Southeast Michigan and grants have been awarded in those communities.

The youth sports fund is the second endowment established at the Community Foundation by the Wilson Foundation. In December 2015, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund for Smart Strategy was created with a \$500,000 gift from the Wilson Foundation. This permanent fund provides ongoing grant support for expert research, evaluation, intelligence gathering, and assessment of best practices for community improvement.

The first grant from the Smart Strategy fund was used to research and write "Poverty and Self-Sufficiency in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area," a report released in September 2016. This report updated the 2013 poverty report compiled by the Community Foundation and ACT Rochester, which brought the depth and breadth of Rochester's poverty to the forefront.