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**GREATER
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A Message From the CEO

Fifty years ago, a small group of community-minded leaders came together with a shared love for the Worcester region and a deep commitment to its people. They believed that generosity could be a lasting force for good and envisioned an organization that would help neighbors support one another and strengthen the place they all called home. From that vision, Greater Worcester Community Foundation was born.

Since our founding in 1975, the Foundation has been a catalyst for positive change in Central Massachusetts. We connect donors who love this region with opportunities to create lasting impact, transforming their generosity into resources that will strengthen our community for generations to come.

As we celebrate this milestone, we are also looking ahead. This year, we introduced a refreshed brand that honors our history while expressing who we are today: an organization focused on greater giving and greater impact for all of Worcester County. This new identity reflects how we have evolved alongside the 60 towns and cities we serve and how we remain committed to meeting the moment with creativity, collaboration and purpose.

In recent years, we have responded to our region's evolving needs by deepening our investment in the nonprofit sector, expanding our scholarships to support the next generation, and launching countywide initiatives to address some of the region's most pressing challenges and opportunities.

We are particularly proud of our commitment to local nonprofits, supporting not only their day-to-day programming and operations but also strengthening their resilience through capacity-building workshops, funding and learning cohorts. As these organizations adapt to shifting federal priorities and reductions in government funding, investing in their sustainability is essential to ensuring their continued impact.

As we plan for the next 50 years, we will continue to listen, learn and respond to the community's needs, guided by the robust network of nonprofits, fundholders, community members and youth who have helped the Foundation become the regional leader it is today.

Thank you for being part of our story — past, present, and future. With appreciation,



*Pete Dunn
President & CEO
Greater Worcester Community Foundation*

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*"Keep up the good work in deeply connecting with the people in Worcester County
who bring the many services as well as the arts to our many communities!"*

Evya Dueck, 19 Carter executive director

Reflecting on the past, looking to the future

Greater Worcester Community Foundation was the brainchild of a small group of civic leaders who met in the mid-1970s to think about the changing landscape of Worcester and discuss how a community foundation might work for the city.

At the time, Worcester was already home to several philanthropists that had set up family foundations in the area. The founders envisioned a place for others that didn't have the time, resources or capacity to establish their own foundations but still wanted to give back to the community.

"We wanted to be an organization that would appeal not just to a few, but many people," said founder Henry "Harry" Dewey in a video interview. After Harry passed away in 2023, only one original founder of the Foundation remains.

Sumner "Tony" Tilton Jr. said of the founding, "We wanted to try it out."

He recalled the involvement of Harry, of the law firm Bowditch and Dewey, as well as Robert Cushman, CEO of the Norton Company and Chuck Dewey, president of Mechanics National Bank of Worcester.

Further documentation by founder Robert Massey adds the "wise and essential" participation of Robert Hess, Thomas Green, John Adam Jr., John Lund, Anne Morgan and Marion Fletcher to that roster.

Tilton noted other members of the charitable community, many who managed private foundations, joined conversations in those early stages.

"We talked about what community foundations are all about and how they worked," Tilton said. "The explanation was that it is a repository for various trusts and accounts."

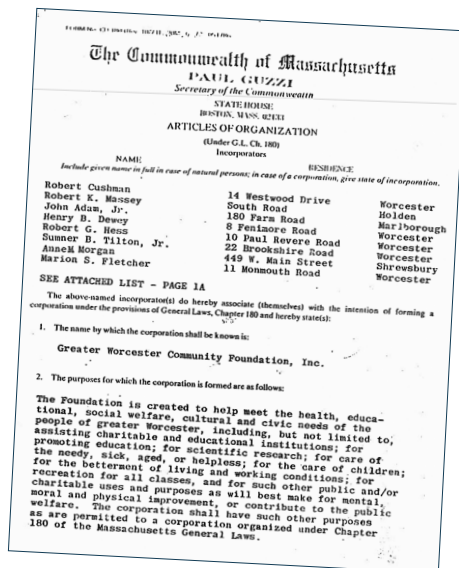
Discussions also included how "this would not be an adjunct" of the United Way, according to Tilton. Rather, if United Way was "sort of a checking account," then a community foundation would be its "savings account" counterpart.

Private foundations, Tilton said, fit into a "three-legged stool," as places to hold various endowments for charitable purposes.

"Everyone thought it was kind of cool," Tilton said of this arrangement.

On September 18, 1975, the Articles of Organization were approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

During that decade, several milestones occurred. Cushman was elected president and Lund became volunteer part-time director.



A lot of firsts happened as well.

The first major gift was the \$1.3 million Jeppson Memorial Fund and the first scholarship was the Lawrence M. and Augusta L. Scholarship Fund. The Robert and Mary Cushman Fund was the first discretionary one.

Kay M. Seivard was appointed the first full-time executive director, a position she held for 12 years. Both Tilton and Ann Lisi, her successor, credited the first director with laying the groundwork and a strong base from which Greater Worcester Community Foundation would build.

Reflecting on her own journey, Lisi said she was a "collaborative convener" supporting the Foundation as a program officer and after three years, as interim director and then permanent executive director for nearly 30 years (1992-2019).

She said Seivard had put systems in place for scholarships and donor advised and discretionary funds and established a good reputation as being a "fair and legitimate organization with \$25 million in endowments."

With four or five staff members, Lisi said she helped provide continuity and strived to engage people in their own community.

Lisi said she spent her time listening to people's needs and concerns, always with a mindset to modify programs if they were not working.

Beyond granting money, she brought in technical assistance to help support non-



Circa 2000, former GWCF executive director Ann Lisi (right) is shown with then-staff members Audrey Klein-Leach and Elizabeth Wilder.

profits, to make their leaders comfortable asking for help "for things they did not want to talk about—human resources, accounting, problems... We made it a safe place for discussions."

GWCF, United Way of Central Massachusetts and the Colleges of Worcester Consortium formed the Coalition for Not-for-Profit Management Assistance, which later became the Foundation's Nonprofit Support Center. Tilton also spoke about the importance of providing 5013C organizations with tools to become better leaders and board members and have smoother operations.

Today, Lisi said, she is especially proud of the NSC as well as YCI, the Youth for Community Improvement program that remains strong after 25 years.

She noted that research has shown that engaging young people outside of school points them in stabilizing directions. In addition to becoming grant makers, "the program teaches them the process of collaboration, decision-making and all the skills to prioritize and use money," Lisi said.

The fundamentals of GWCF have not changed, Lisi said, noting it has always been at the forefront of supporting issues people face.

One example was LGBTQ advocacy before there was marriage equality with the help of Dr. Peter Levine, former president and CEO of UMass Memorial Healthcare.

Others Lisi cited included affordable housing, early childhood support and literacy.

"The point was, and still is, to demonstrate true concern, raise awareness and get local people engaged in things that matter for their neighbors," Lisi said.

Chris O'Keeffe, who has worked in nonprofits for more than 30 years, considers his time at GWCF as vice president for programming (2013-2020) as the highlight

of his career.

“Almost as soon as I arrived, I discovered that GWCF is one of very few places in Worcester where the “haves” and “have nots” are visible to each other. I found that it builds community across lines of race, class and socioeconomic status,” he said.

O’Keeffe said during his tenure, he was proud to be a part of the Foundation “ramping up” its presence.

“Instead of just being a place to go for grants, GWCF has become a powerful source of connections, ideas and shared leadership throughout the community,” O’Keeffe said.

“It seemed that wherever the community came together to address problems, we were there contributing ideas as well as money and helping to form powerful connections,” he added.

Tilton, now 87-years-old, continues to make an impact on the Foundation, through the scholarship he and his sister set up in memory of their father in 1981.

Up until this year with the Becker Scholarship Fund, the Sumner B. Tilton Memorial Scholarship was the largest of its kind at the Foundation. Its focus is to support students attending any “outstanding” college or law school, reflecting his father’s commit-

“It seemed that wherever the community came together to address problems, we were there contributing ideas as well as money and helping to form powerful connections.”

Chris O’Keeffe, former GWCF vice president of programming

ment to higher education.

The Tilton scholarship - as GWCF’s largest scholarship fund to date, has supported 252 students totaling \$2.1 million in awards since 1998.

Tilton continues to follow GWCF’s efforts, saying that reaching its 50th year milestone was not the result of luck, but dependent on hard work.

“The Foundation has grown (in) money and under management. They are a power to be reckoned with today,” he said.

Current President & CEO Peter Dunn

brought 30 years of experience working in the community foundation/philanthropic sector to the role he assumed two years ago. His career has spanned several states, helping to build local philanthropic institutions.

“Each place I’ve been was a great opportunity to create more impact,” Dunn said.

With family connections in New England, Dunn said the possibilities inherent at GWCF made it an attractive challenge. Its long-standing presence in and effect on the communities it serves were also appealing.

“GWCF has an amazing base from which to build,” Dunn said. “A 50-year history of doing work with nonprofits is impressive. We support not only their programs and operations, but also contribute to their capacity building and sustainability.”

Looking ahead, Dunn wants to concentrate on GWCF inspiring future generations of philanthropists, expanding legacy giving and using all the tools at its disposal to create greater impact on issues important to people and communities.

Dunn said the organization’s re-branding during this 50th anniversary year is a tangible indicator of GWCF’s commitment to a “forward focus.”

Summarizing GWCF’s journey to 2025, Tilton added, “It’s been a rousing success.” ■



Fletcher Tilton proudly congratulates The Greater Worcester Community Foundation on 50 years of impact and leadership.

For five decades, the Foundation has been a powerful force for good—uniting our community, empowering local voices, and driving meaningful change across Greater Worcester.

As trusted stewards of generosity and champions of equity, your vision and values continue to inspire.

Here’s to the next 50 years of building a stronger, more vibrant community—together.

Fletcher Tilton PC
Attorneys at law



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Timeline

1970s

1975

- After months of study and planning by the small group convened by Robert K. Massey and other community leaders, the Articles of Organization are approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on September 18, 1975.
- Robert Cushman is elected President, John W. Lund becomes volunteer part-time Executive Director, and the effort to build the initial endowment is launched.

1977

- First major gift: \$1.3 million Jeppson Memorial Fund, John Jeppson.
- GWCF makes its first grants to the Mechanics Hall Restoration, Bancroft School, and the American Antiquarian Society.

1978

- First scholarship fund: Lawrence M. (pictured) and Augusta L. Keeler Scholarship Fund.
- First discretionary named fund: Robert and Mary Cushman Fund



1979

- Kay M. Seivard is appointed full-time Executive Director.

1980s

1980

- John Adam, Jr. is elected President.
- First corporate gifts from Hanover Insurance Company and Wright Line, Inc.

1981

- A challenge grant from The Doehla Foundation and other gifts start the Youth Opportunity Fund, the Foundation's first field of interest fund.

1983

- First agency endowment fund established in an effort to stabilize Great Brook Valley Health Center.
- Robert H. Wetzel elected President.

1984

- First bequest - \$252,000 from Marion B. Kubelus and Marion Zell Nesbit Memorial Fund.
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation awards GWCF one of eight grants nationally to participate in Neighborhood Small Grants Program.
- Directors and Corporators Fund established.

1985

- Assets top "magic" \$5 million mark with receipt of a \$2,956,932 trust to create Eliza D. and Cora J. D. Dodge Fund.
- Establishment of Sumner B. Tilton and Guaranty Bank Scholarship Funds add strong new growth to scholarship program and make County-wide awards available.

1986

- Tenth Anniversary celebrated with gala Mechanics Hall event featuring volunteer awards, address by Council on Foundations President James Josephs.

1987

- Steven P. Antinelli, first program officer, leads to development of systematic grants application and award procedures.

1988

- Largest gift until this year: \$10 million Robert W. Booth (pictured) Fund honoring George F. Booth, that year the nation's largest gift to any community foundation.
- Michael P. Angelini elected the Foundation's fourth President.



1989

- Ann T. Lisi joins the staff as Program Officer.

1990s

1990

- John M. Nelson elected fifth President.

1991

- GWCF and the City of Worcester join in supporting the Worcester Neighborhood Development Collaborative.
- United Way of Central Massachusetts, the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, and the GWCF form the Coalition for Not-for-Profit Management Assistance, which provided workshops, seminars, and short-term consultation for nonprofits.

1992

- Ann T. Lisi succeeds Kay M. Marquet as Executive Director.

1994

- Sumner B. Tilton, Jr. is elected sixth President.

1995

- Acorn Society is formed to honor individuals who have provided for GWCF a bequest, life insurance, retirement asset, charitable trust, pooled income fund or other similar deferred gift.

1998

- Reflecting the increasing number and scope of its services, the Coalition for

Not-for-Profit Management Assistance, became an established project of the GWCF and changed its name to the Nonprofit Support Center (NSC).

2000s

2004

- The Renaissance Award is established through an endowment created by founding member of GWCF John W. ("Jack") Lund.

2005

- First Renaissance Award: Patsy Lewis, Worcester Community Action Council.
- GLBT Partnership Fund established to serve the growing needs of the GLBT community in Central Massachusetts.

2007

- Recruited 19 teenagers for YCI, the largest group since this program started in 1999.

2009

- Convened first annual roundtable of major health care funders to identify regional priorities, complementary funding strategies and gaps.

2010s

2011

- Established the Professional Advisors Network to engage financial advisors in recruiting new donors and expand relationships with advisors, who value the Foundation as a vehicle to meet clients' financial and philanthropic goals.

2016

- The Early Childhood Initiative of the Foundation gained momentum with grants, partnerships and public policy advocacy. Its goal is to develop resources and practices region-wide that give children a stronger start during their formative first years.

2017

- GWCF is one of five community foundations selected by the Barr Foundation to participate in its Creative Commonwealth Initiative. Creative Worcester is formed, designed to advance the region's arts and cultural resources.

2018

- Creative Worcester completed its first full year spearheading Worcester's first Cultural Plan; awarding 11 Creative Spark grants totaling \$69,000 and granting a total of \$300,000 to five Creative Engagement grantees who took part in a year-long learning cohort.
- The Foundation's Early Childhood

"I'm delighted to congratulate GWCF on this remarkable milestone. Fifty years of service speaks to their deep commitment, thoughtful leadership and genuine care for the community. Their impact over the past half century has been profound and I'm confident their next 50 years will be just as transformative."

Emily Farrell, Literacy Volunteers of South Central Massachusetts executive director

Initiative awards \$403,000 in grants and plays a key role in forming the Together For Kids Coalition.

2020-2025

2020

- Within days of the pandemic shutdown in 2020, the Foundation worked together with the United Way of Central Massachusetts to bring relief to vulnerable populations within Worcester County. Recognizing that a single fund would streamline collecting gifts and distributing grants, the two

joined forces to create the Worcester Together: Central Mass COVID-19 Fund, which raised \$10.8 million in its first year.

2023

- Pete Dunn joins the team as President & CEO from Syracuse, where he led the Central New York Community Foundation for 15 years.
- The Foundation moves offices to 1 Mercantile Street, celebrating with an open house.

2024

- Nonprofit Support Center is reinigorated post-covid with a \$1

million investment over three years.

- Foundation partners with the Worcester Regional Research Bureau to launch Worcester County Insights.
- Local donor family helps launch the Worcester County Green Fund, a \$1 million investment to support local climate action efforts throughout the region.
- Foundation announces a \$1 million partnership with Worcester Community Housing Resources, providing a low interest line of credit to support much needed housing initiatives in Worcester County.

Celebrating 50 Years of Community Leadership

Greater Worcester Community Foundation has spent five decades bringing people together to drive lasting, inclusive change — not for one cause, but for the good of all.

At Fidelity Bank, we believe in doing good — for our clients, our communities, and each other.

That's why we're proud to support GWCF and their citizen-led commitment to building a stronger, more vibrant Worcester County.

Congratulations on 50 years of impact.

We're honored to be part of your journey.

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Managing the need to make a difference

Since 1975, generous individuals, families and organizations have used Greater Worcester Community Foundation to manage their charitable giving through a named fund.

The Foundation offers several different types of funds to meet individual values and giving goals, whether that is during the donor's lifetime or to leave a legacy.

GWCF also offers fund options for organizations looking to give back to their community and endowment funds for nonprofits that they can use to support their own work.

The donor has the option of being involved in the grantmaking or leaving the decisions up to GWCF. And the Foundation handles all administrative duties.

Kelly Stimson, vice president of philanthropic services, is the longest serving current staff member at 19 years. Over this time, she has seen a change in how the Foundation carries out its philanthropy.

"We're very much more out in the community, more visible, and meeting with people to help them meet their philanthropic goals," Stimson said. This outreach exists in tandem with GWCF's open door policy, and an alternative to relying on digital systems.

"We are here if the donor wants a (human) voice on the other side and a very safe space to work in with individualized attention," Stimson added.

Once a fund is established, the Foundation pools it with other funds in one of three portfolio options, each designed to ensure the preservation and growth of principal and a dependable source of revenue for distribution and expenses.

The interest earned on these invested funds are used to make grants to nonprofits working to make the region's communities better places to live, work and thrive.

Former Executive Director Ann Lisi noted, "People want to leave money for their communities and this is the best way because it is enduring, efficient and strategic."

Philanthropy, Lisi said, speaks to the "human need to make a difference."

The fund options include donor advised,

discretionary, fields of interest, designated, scholarship, agency and corporate giving. GWCF has approximately 650 funds totaling \$250 million in assets.

Stimson said there are currently more than 130 donor advised funds, which allow donors to play an active role in their charitable giving.

Victor Ambros and his wife Rosalind Lee established a donor advised fund at the Foundation. Ambros is on the faculty at UMass Chan Medical School and Lee is a staff scientist/researcher there.

Their fund was established after Ambros

supported are: MITES, a program for students helping them navigate the college application process; an outreach initiative at Worcester high schools for underserved students; and Partners in Health to support medical care for people who cannot afford it.

Ambros and Lee also geared funds to UMass Medical School, which they described as a "huge economic driver," for the region and "a leading institute."

Having Greater Worcester Community Foundation manage their charitable giving "made it so easy for us to become philanthropists," according to Ambros.

As to why people should consider donating on behalf of causes important to them, Ambros said, "We are all neighbors...It's a way to have influence on the wellbeing of your neighbors and invest in your communities."

Individuals can also leave a gift through their will or trust. Stimson said its legacy Acorn Society has 120 members.

The Acorn Society honors donors who have established planned gifts or provided for the Foundation in their wills.

Christopher O'Keeffe, who was GWCF's vice president of programming from 2013 to 2020, recently became a member of the Acorn Society following his wife's passing in January.

"Having had an insider's perspective on how GWCF makes its grant decisions, I'm completely comfortable with using it as the primary vehicle for my philanthropic legacy," O'Keeffe said.

O'Keeffe said he wants to devote a substantial portion of his support to immigrants in Greater Worcester County.

"They are a viciously targeted group that deserves to be defended and treated fairly," O'Keeffe said.

Fields of interest funds are an option for donors who wish to direct their money to a specific issue, while still relying on the Foundation to determine the grantees.

Sometimes, field of interest grants are based on factors like geography. For example, Stimson referred to the Leicester Savings Bank endowment, which was seeded with \$1 million in 1998. The fund remains at that level now--while having also granted



won \$3 million from the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences in 2015. Investments will continue as they retire using money from his Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2024.

"It's seamless," Ambros said of the charitable giving process with GWCF. He noted they opted to "steer where funds go," independently using their DAF, with Lee adding, "We have a very hands-on attitude to our philanthropy."

Among the local causes the couple

more than \$1 million back to the Leicester community

Its intention is to be a permanent resource to financially support organizations, initiatives and projects that improve the strength and vibrancy of Leicester.

In particular, the fund contributes to community events like the Leicester Harvest Fair, recreational opportunities like the School Special Olympics Day Games and the Burncoat Park re-opening. Artistic performances including a summer concert series and senior entertainment programming are other recipients.

There is also a human services emphasis with funds granted for heat assistance and senior citizen outreach.

Stimson said GWCF has also partnered with the Worcester County Food Bank (WCFB) to create its Fund to End Hunger. Established in 2011, it is a resource to support nonprofit organizations working towards a hunger-free Worcester County.

Its focus includes increasing access to healthy foods, building capacity for food serving organizations and advocacy or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) and efforts to support those considered benefit ineligible.

Stimson said GWCF provides its expertise while WCFB commits approximately \$100,000 per year.

Executive Director Juliet Feibel said Arts-

Worcester has been a grantee of the Foundation for decades. In 2018, her organization opened its first agency fund.

“For smaller organizations, unlikely to have professional-level financial and investment expertise on their boards, GWCF agency funds are an incredible asset,” she said.

Feibel said ArtsWorcester can rely on GWCF for long-term sustainability, in this case, an endowment, with total confidence in the Foundation’s investment expertise.

“We know that our agency fund fees go to not just their management, but support the very same mission-aligned projects and organizational growth that led to those funds in the first place,” she said. ■

The great connector

Foundation provides nonprofits with professional development, grant funding

One of the key ways Greater Worcester Community Foundation is involved in the region is through its Nonprofit Support Center, established in 1999 and designed to stimulate the development of a capable, forward thinking and collaborative nonprofit sector.

Following a reduction in programming because of COVID-19, GWCF reinvigorated the Center in 2024 with a \$1 million commitment over three years to support Worcester County nonprofits.

“The Foundation has a long history with local nonprofits,” said GWCF CEO Peter Dunn. “We are a connector and resource—providing organizations with funds to build capacity, do their work better and advance their ability to have an impact in an infinite number of areas.”

On the professional development side, Sarah Shugrue, GWCF’s director of grantmaking and capacity building, said a priority is to network with nonprofit leaders and give them access to local high quality education and board trainings.

Annually, the Center offers a seminar series with eight to 12 workshops on topics like financial planning, storytelling for nonprofits, fundraising and facing change, as would be the case if a nonprofit acquired new leadership.

“We have a lot of resources and coaching if a nonprofit is facing a decision or challenge,” Shugrue said. “They can pick up the phone and have a conversation with a person (here) on the other end.”

Shugrue said GWCF looks holistically at helping nonprofits to thrive.

“It’s cool to lead on a role in the commu-

nity beyond being a funder,” she added.

Evy Dueck is executive director of 19 Carter, a multi-generational community gathering space in Berlin. She appreciates that the Foundation is connected to local resources. Because of this knowledge, GWCF can match nonprofits with donors and support where it makes the most sense.

“They are amongst us and know the needs in our communities first hand,” she said. “They take the time to visit the non-profits they serve in person to get a real-life perspective of what it is we’re doing to serve our specific community,” Dueck said.

Juliet Feibel, executive director of Arts-Worcester, agreed. “No other granting organization has both the broad understanding of Worcester County’s nonprofit ecosystem and the granular knowledge of the players and pieces that make it work,” she said.

Lovo Koliego, president/CEO of CHANGE called the Foundation “a trusted connector between donors and community needs.” CHANGE stands for Community Health Awareness Grows Equity and partners with GWCF to advance its mission of serving immigrant and underserved families.

Koliego noted, “GWCF plays a pivotal role in ensuring the philanthropic resources are directed toward efforts that advance, equity, build grassroots leadership and address the region’s most pressing challenges.”

Emily Farrell is executive director of Literacy Volunteers of South Central Massachusetts (LVSCM), a nonprofit providing free tutoring to adults in basic literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

GWCF has supported LVSCM for nearly a decade—with operating funds through the



Community Grant Program and professional development offerings at the Nonprofit Support Center.

“GWCF plays a vital role in strengthening the Greater Worcester region,” Farrell said. “They have a unique ability to assess community needs and assets from a broad, informed perspective and to connect organizations and individuals in ways that amplify impact.”

Farrell added, “Their leadership helps build a stronger, more connected, and more equitable community.”

Annually, Greater Worcester Community Foundation offers a range of competitive grant cycles to provide area nonprofits with general operational and project funding. Focus areas include health and wellbeing, arts and creativity, basic needs, economic opportunity and youth development. Grants range from \$2,500 to \$50,000.

GWCF is a long-time supporter of the SHINE Initiative, dating back to 2014.

SHINE Executive Director Charisse Mur-

phy said her nonprofit has received monetary support, professional development, networking opportunities and exposure for its organization thanks to the Foundation.

For small nonprofits like SHINE, Murphy said the availability of operating support grants is “music to our ears” because it allows the nonprofit to direct the funds to its greatest needs.

In this way, GWCF helps SHINE carry out its mission of combatting discrimination and destigmatize mental health conditions in youth and young adults.

Feibel said GWCF provided the unrestricted operating funds that kept Arts-Worcester open through the “doldrums of the early 1990s and the Great Recession.”

Feibel said the Foundation was an early funder of the Future Art Workers program, which offers paid youth apprenticeships in arts administration. GWCF’s funding helped support focus groups, pilot activities and the first year of program operation.

She said the early support from the Foundation not only launched the project, but also indicated to other funders its interest and confidence in this effort, “unlocking other forms of generosity.”

GWCF’s leadership and ability to take informed risks, “makes the difference between an organization needing to stick with the status quo and an organization empowered to innovate and respond to its community,” Feibel said.

Joel Wallen is associate executive director at Pernet Family Health Service, a 70-year-old home health agency. Wallen said he appreciated the way GWCF approached the nonprofit as a partner, rather than a funder.

“To me,” Wallen said, “The Foundation is one of the main pillars of Worcester County and pleasant to engage with as they take a holistic approach,” while working with nonprofits.

He said funding from GWCF supported a newborn home visiting nursing program. Wallen said he also benefitted from the Foundation’s skill building professional development for leaders.

“Our goal is to make nonprofits stronger so that they don’t need us anymore,” added Jonathan Cohen, the Foundation’s vice president of community impact. ■



Scholarship program offers ‘a bundle of opportunities’ for students

Since its establishment in 1978, Greater Worcester Community Foundation’s scholarship program has granted \$14.8 million, distributed 9,943 awards and created 140 funds.

Outside of colleges and universities themselves, the Foundation’s scholarship program is the largest source of scholarship support in Worcester County, primarily focused on high school seniors that live in the County and intend to pursue two- or four-year undergraduate degrees.

It began with The Lawrence M. and Augusta L. Keeler Scholarship Fund, given to students from Northbridge who have financial need and strong motivation to succeed in college.

Originally a gift amounting to \$45,221, the Keeler Scholarship has grown to \$176,000 and has distributed 119 awards totaling \$140,250 since 1998.

In 2025, the Foundation supported 443 students with \$1.84 million in scholarship awards. Of these funds, 234 were new scholarships for high school seniors starting college in the fall—with 138 one-time awards and 96 renewable awards to support students throughout their college experiences.

In addition, 209 scholarship renewals were granted to students already attending college.

Criteria for the funds include academic achievement, participation in sports or the arts, financial need, community involvement, location of residence or workplace and other factors determined by the donor.

Of the 234 awardees, nearly two-thirds plan to study in Massachusetts and 53 students will attend institutions in the Worcester area. Through a special partnership with Assumption University, Foundation scholarship recipients attending Assumption also receive matching funds from the institution.

Five of 2025’s seven Worcester Public School valedictorians received scholarships in May, including Melina Fana Aquina, University Park Campus School, \$4,000 from the Worcester Women’s Club Scholarship Fund; Alexandra Lech, North High School, \$8,000 from the Sumner B. Tilton Memorial Scholarship Fund; and Kasie Young, Burncoat High School, \$20,000 from the Mary T. Cocaine Scholarship Fund.

Recipient Dea Kamberi (pictured), valedictorian from Doherty Memorial High

School, was awarded \$16,000 from the Harold R. Jensen Memorial Scholarship Fund. She is currently attending Harvard University, concentrating in government and economics on a pre-law track.

Kamberi noted she hopes to attend law school and become a politician.

“This scholarship fund is a bundle of opportunities for many students like myself, and its ease of access only emphasizes its value as a resource,” she said.

Kamberi said receiving the award reinforced a pride in her hard work and dedication to education as well as helped bring her closer to her career goals with less financial burden.

Funbi Fatoke (pictured), the valedictorian from Worcester Technical High School, was awarded \$2,000 from the Anthony E. Mickunas Memorial Scholarship Fund.

Fatoke is currently attending UMass Amherst as a biology major with aspirations to become a medical doctor. She would also like to pursue business.

“It is so worth applying for this wonderful scholarship because it saved me so much money for college and gave me the exposure of meeting many wonderful people,” Fatoke said.

Becker College’s \$13 million gift transforms scholarship opportunities

Looking ahead to 2026, the Becker Scholarship program was made possible by a transformative \$13 million gift from the former Becker College. The new fund will prioritize scholarships for students in Worcester and Leicester, where the former campuses were located. Multi-year awards will help to cover the costs of tuition, room and board, books and academic materials and other eligible costs of college attendance.

The gift from Becker College also includes the transfer of the Grace S. Hampel Scholarship Fund, totaling \$778,000. This restricted scholarship fund will prioritize students that are graduates of Hoosac Valley High School or residents of Berkshire County who plan to attend college in Worcester County.

Also in 2026, the Becker Scholarship



Program includes a \$2 million Becker Global Public Service Award. In recognition of Becker College's commitment to global human welfare, the monetary award will support a humanitarian project anywhere in the world, developed and led by a rising college or university senior.

Noted Amaris Gonzalez, program officer, "It is exciting to provide this opportunity, which goes beyond a typical award and honors Becker's belief in making a difference all over the world."

College and university presidents in Worcester County will have the opportunity to nominate one student per year from their schools. The award selection process will be overseen by GWCF along with a volunteer committee. ■



YOUTH PHILANTHROPISTS INITIATE COMMUNITY CHANGE

Since its inception in 1998, the Youth for Community Improvement (YCI) initiative has graduated 225 students and awarded \$350,000 in grants to nonprofits across Worcester County.

The youth-led program gives high school students the opportunity to develop leadership, critical thinking and communication skills as they identify issues of importance to them. They then work with nonprofits on projects designed to create effective change in their communities.

"The focus is on civic leadership," said Program Officer for Youth and Families Amaris Gonzalez.

"And the students make all of the decisions."

Gonzalez explained participants learn all about grant making—building out a grant cycle, creating applications, interviewing applicants and through consensus, determining the recipients and deciding the amount of funds they will allocate.

In addition, the program allows students to meet teens from communities across the county, hear a range of other perspectives and create bonds.

The YCI program runs from September through April and expanded from having 15 to 17 teens per cohort to currently 22 to 28 participants.

This year, 11 grants were awarded. Each year, \$25,000 to \$40,000 is allocated with a \$5,000 cap per project.

Students identify causes like mental health, arts and music in schools, and assistance to the unhoused and work on a project that addresses the issue.

For example, during a school break, YCI participants partnered with Provision Ministry to assemble 250 care packages for homeless people.

With a grant to Community Health Awareness Network Grows Equity (CHANGE), the YCI helped that organization sustain its Changemakers summer youth leadership program.

"Changemakers empowers immigrant youth to develop confidence, leadership skills and a strong sense of civic engagement," said CHANGE President and CEO Lovo Koliego.

And YCI provided Regional Environmental Council with a grant for a financial literacy program, which Gonzalez noted, builds confidence in teens and gives them important skills for life.

"These grants support all different spaces such as health and wellbeing, the arts and youth and development," Gonzalez added.

Ansh B., a 2024-2025 YCI participant, noted, "One of the main takeaways from YCI is the impact of collaboration and working together to develop solutions that will help our community. Through a positive mindset and being aware of what's happening in our community, anybody can be a philanthropist."



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We're committed to building **stronger communities** across New England—and especially right here in **Worcester**. From **constructing new schools** to **supporting local nonprofits**, we're proud to invest in the future of this **city we call home**.

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Affordable housing, arts among ‘impactful’ contribution areas

Available, accessible and impactful,” are the words used by Jonathan Cohen to describe Greater Worcester Community Foundation. Cohen, current vice president of community impact, said his work focuses on overseeing “outward facing” initiatives. These initiatives tackle a range of issues important to the region and the Foundation has intentionally designed its work to be county-wide, actively looking for ways to be of value to all the cities and towns in Worcester County.

Affordable Housing

One focus area is affordable housing. In 2024, the Foundation awarded a \$1 million low-interest line of credit to Worcester Community Housing Resources, a nonprofit that works with private and public partners to develop home ownership and rental housing in key neighborhood locations throughout the region.

The funding resulted in the creation of 12 quality, long-term affordable housing units across Worcester County.



Andy Howarth, director of development at Worcester Community Housing Resources, noted the projects demonstrate how impact investments can address diverse affordable housing challenges: from supporting emerging developers to providing construction financing and enabling innovative approaches like receivership.

“Having an extra million dollars to combine with our resources has been amazing,” Howarth said. “It allowed us to do three projects that we wouldn’t have otherwise been able to take on.”

A long vacant property on 49 West Street in Worcester is being rehabilitated into seven affordable units: three studios, three one-bedrooms and one two-bedroom. Six of these units will be available for residents earning 30% of area median income and one at 60%.

In Hardwick, the renovation of an 1880s home on 67-69 Petersham Road is supported by \$351,000 from the Foundation’s line of credit. The conversion to three affordable rental units are for households earning below 80% of area median income.

And on 12 Congress Street, an abandoned property for a decade is being saved through a receivership. GWCF provided \$515,000 in financing from its line of credit to convert the property into two owner-occupied condominiums geared to first-time buyers.

Arts and Creativity

GWCF is the largest funder of arts programming in the region, thanks to its longstanding participation in the Creative Commonwealth Initiative, a 10-year-partnership between the Barr Foundation and community foundations to elevate arts and cultural expression across the state.

The Foundation supports several programs, including Assets for Artists for Worcester County-based artists that is run in collaboration with ArtsWorcester. It includes a six-month series of workshops, coaching and networking to elevate the creative and business practices of artists.

Cohen explained Assets for Artists is a capacity building program that is a continuation of GWCF’s 2022-2023 Business of Art program. It is open to artists involved in design, visual, performing and spoken



word art and gives them the tools to make a living out of their creative skills.

“GWCF recognized early on how important arts and creativity are to every aspect of the region--to economic growth, to learning at all ages, to neighborhood development and to equity and expression and doubled down on its support for them,” said Juliet Feibel, ArtsWorcester executive director.

Two cohorts, totaling 31 artists, have completed the program to date, with a third cohort currently underway.

With support from the Barr Foundation,

“GWCF recognized early on how important arts and creativity are to every aspect of the region--to economic growth, to learning at all ages, to neighborhood development and to equity and expression and doubled down on its support for them.”

Juliet Feibel, ArtsWorcester executive director



(totaling \$2.5 million to date) and donors, GWCF launched Creative Worcester County in 2018, which invests in the arts in multiple ways.

In partnership with the city and Worcester Cultural Coalition, Cohen noted funding was used to create and activate the first cultural plan for Worcester, which was released in 2019.

“It still has legs,” he said of the plan. “The cultural sector relies on it.”

Creative Worcester’s focus is supporting the arts as a key driver of wellbeing and vitality and a central component of civic life.

Other efforts included 38 collaborations funded by \$410,000 in Creative Intersection Grants. The partnerships connected nonprofits with schools, hospitals, senior centers and other community organizations to incorporate art and improve services to individuals and families.

Additionally, resources are given to support artists and organizations in presenting their projects at the Jean McDonough Arts Center. And GWCF has increased its investment in arts and culture year over year through its Community Grants program.

Worcester County Insights

Worcester County Insights is an interactive website with local data designed to give a comprehensive portrait of the community.

GWCF and Worcester Regional Research Bureau sponsored the website and it was developed by the Center for Governmental Research.

Cohen described Worcester County Insights as “dashboard data in a digestible format,” aimed at helping community members and leaders access information about the county’s 60 cities and towns all in one place.

He said it is also helpful to nonprofit leaders as they seek grants that require several data points in the application process.

The “public education tool,” can help coordinate responses and direct funds and resources for greater impact towards solutions tailored to Worcester County, according to Cohen.

In the future, Cohen said there is potential to expand the dashboard to tell stories about the data and track changes and achievements in the areas GWCF serves.

By examining local and regional needs, Worcester County Insights brings awareness to potential disparities across geography, race, age, gender, economics and more.

Worcester County Green Fund

A donor family, passionate about combating climate change in Worcester County, established a Green Fund about 1 ½ years ago. The fund is seeded with \$100,000 per year for five years, matched by GWCF for a total investment of \$1 million.

The Green Fund’s first investments focused on supporting the 22 land trusts that cover Worcester County, providing capacity-building grants to support their land conservation efforts.

The Land Trust Capacity-Building Grant Program is providing up to two years of support by investing in activities that will strengthen the capacity of land trusts to do their work, including strategic planning, volunteer management, grant navigation, project management, leadership development and scaling internal systems.

“There is a broad network of volunteers doing good work and we want to help them do it better,” Cohen said.

Additionally, the Foundation is partnering with Mass Audubon’s Central Region to explore opportunities to form a county-wide climate coalition.

They are hoping to bring together the numerous organizations and nonprofits that are working to address climate change at the

local level.

In its early stages, Cohen believes this initiative is on a “pathway for success.”

He noted a key piece is that in general, there is a sense of hopelessness by people regarding climate change. “If we can get them together, they will not feel so alone. Collectively and out of silos, they can spread the message and feel that hope.” ■

*“Thank you for being
such a phenomenal
support in the community
for nonprofits and
congratulations on
turning 50; it looks good
on you!”*

Charisse Murphy, Shine
Initiative executive director

A large, bold, blue graphic of the number '50' followed by the word 'years' in a sans-serif font. The '5' and '0' are very large and thick, while 'years' is smaller and positioned below the '0'.

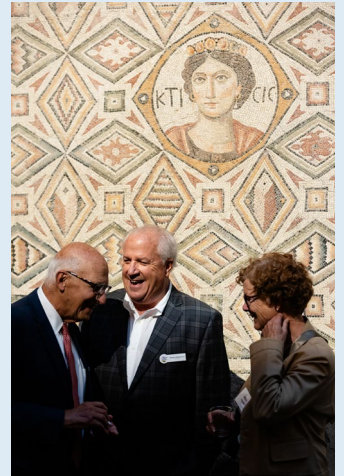
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"Reaching 50 years is a remarkable milestone that speaks to the Greater Worcester Community Foundation's enduring vision, steadfast leadership, and deep-rooted commitment to the people of Worcester and Central Massachusetts."

Lovo Koliego, Community Health Network Grows Equity president/CEO



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Congratulations on celebrating 50 years of growth



Todd Wetzel and his son, Robbie Wetzel.
Inset: Robert H. Wetzel, president of the
foundation in 1985.

...from \$7m to nearly \$250m today!

Since its' early days in 1975, The Wetzel family has long been involved with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. In 1985, when the foundation was valued at \$7 million, Todd's father and Robbie's grandfather, Bob Wetzel, proudly served as its president. Now, four decades later, the foundation has grown to \$250 million, demonstrating that long-term investment in our community truly yields great returns. As Bob stated then, we owe a debt of gratitude to the visionary community members who established the foundation 50 years ago.



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