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# WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

A newsletter from Four County Community Foundation

WINTER 2025

## Bucks for Books supports Imagination Library

In observance of March is Reading Month, the **Friends of Imagination Library** are making plans for their **Bucks for Books** fundraising campaign. Volunteers will be placing donation buckets in local businesses, libraries and schools where patrons can make cash donations toward the program that mails free books to children from birth to age 5. Since Four County Community Foundation's (4CCF) Friends of Imagination Library launched in 2021, this group of volunteers has helped provide books to more than 2,700 children in portions of Lapeer, Oakland and Macomb counties but they need the community's help to keep this program going.



The Lowe siblings enjoy reading an Imagination Library book together.

The Bucks for Books material will also include information that explains how donations can be made online and through other means.

"This campaign is an effort to build up our financial base," said Friends of Imagination Library Committee Chairperson Kathy Markel.

"Interest among families for the Imagination Library program is strong and we need the community's help to make it sustainable."

Markel explains that Imagination Library founder Dolly Parton covers a portion of the cost to mail the books but relies on local affiliates, like 4CCF Friends group, to make up the remainder. Currently, the Four County Imagination Library Fund pays \$2.60 per child each month. For donors looking to quantify their gift that means a donation of just \$31 provides a year of reading for a child and a gift of \$156 equals the cost of providing books to a child enrolled in the program from birth.

"We would like to expand our outreach to social service agencies that help young families, but we don't feel we can do that until we have sufficient funds," Markel said.

In addition to traditional donations, the Imagination Library Fund can receive charitable distributions directed by an individual from their retirement fund.

The committee invites anyone with an interest in promoting early literacy to join them in their efforts. The group meets monthly at 4CCF's office in Romeo. Members also welcome the opportunity to speak to community groups and service clubs about Imagination Library and the work their affiliate is doing.

"Donations of any kind and size are appreciated," Markel said. "We certainly appreciate all our donors, many of whom have given regularly."

To make a donation, visit <https://bit.ly/4CCFImaginationLibrary>, scan the QR code shown below or send a check to 4CCF, 141 S. Main Street, Suite A, Romeo MI 48065.

Look for collection buckets with Dolly Parton's image at local businesses, libraries and schools in March.



## 4CCF thankful for trustees' service

In January, Four County Community Foundation (4CCF) recognized the service of three retiring trustees and welcomed a new member to their board.

**Mitch Blonde, Greg Brynaert and Ken Hummel each completed their nine-year terms. Joining the board is Romeo's Danielle Lee.**



**Mitch Blonde**

**Mitch Blonde** first became acquainted with 4CCF as a donor. After a close friend passed away, Mitch and some of his friends established a scholarship fund in his memory with 4CCF. Since then, Mitch and his wife have also created a scholarship fund in his family's name to benefit fellow graduates of Imlay City High School.

As for the accomplishments Mitch has witnessed as a board member, he finds meaning in the work Executive Director Kathy Dickens has done to expand 4CCF's reach.

"I've been very impressed with Kathy's ability to grow assets - in particular by working with existing foundations to grow our service area and also helping to manage the assets of other non-profits in the service area," he said. Dickens has been at the helm of 4CCF since 2019.

**Greg Brynaert**, of Romeo, leaves the board with an appreciation for learning a great deal about local philanthropy. Whether it was managing finances, exploring community needs or just hearing the perspectives of his fellow board members, Greg said he felt challenged, in a good way, to broaden his horizons.

Prior to joining the board, Greg was acquainted with 4CCF as a Romeo High School staff member who reviewed scholarships.

He likes to summarize the foundation's work in one word—hope. "Hope is what we give to people who want to serve and people who are in need. Hope for a better future," he said.

Greg says he looks forward to seeing 4CCF continue with their current endeavors like growing their endowment, collaborating with other community groups and spreading awareness of what 4CCF does. He also credits much of the foundation's recent success with Dickens' leadership.



**Greg Brynaert**

Almont's **Ken Hummel** is grateful to emeritus board member Dr. Jim Sillers for connecting him with Four County Community Foundation. Ken told Jim, a fellow Rotary Club member, that he was looking for new ways to volunteer in the community.

For the past two years, Ken has served as the board's chairperson.

In his time with 4CCF, Ken said he's witnessed the generosity of others and seen how the foundation can serve as a means for them to give back.

"For the most part, people want to do good things in their community, but they struggle with how to make a difference. I think you have a lot of people in the community with the financial means to give and are happy to do something with it but they don't know where to start. They need a catalyst, and the foundation can be just that."



**Ken Hummel**

Looking to the future, Ken envisions the board celebrating their community roots while strategizing for growth. "I think the board must continue to think bigger. I hope we never say we have 'enough.' I hope we can continue to build the dollars and think outside of the box."

In January, the 4CCF board also took action to appoint officers for 2025. Tricia Dennis is the board's new chairperson and Sharon Muir will serve as vice chairperson. Connie Brzozowski and Johanna Nuculovic continue in their roles as secretary and treasurer, respectively.

## 4CCF welcomes new staff member

In January, 4CCF was pleased to add **Renée Deroche** to our staff in a new role as a **Development Associate**.

Renée will play a crucial role in enhancing the financial sustainability of the foundation by fostering relationships with donor prospects, current donors and managing fundraising campaigns.

"I find myself starting a new chapter in my life here at Four County Community Foundation full of enthusiasm for contributing to the mission and growth of a nonprofit I admire. What better way to start 2025 than jumping into January with a new position! It is my desire to serve in meaningful work with an organization whose mission aligns with my personal values," she said.



# 4CCF shares gratitude at Night of Thanks event

In November, Four County Community Foundation honored the people that make our work in the community possible—sponsors, trustees, retired trustees, donors, volunteers and staff—at our 2024 Night of Thanks event. For the first time, we also invited recent grantees to attend and showcase their grant-funded projects. It was fabulous to have all of these community-minded folks in the beautiful venue that is The Abbey on Main in Romeo!

**Making the night that much more exceptional was our Night of Thanks sponsor, Comcast, who went above and beyond to gift 50 brand new laptop computers to the grantees in attendance!**

Many thanks to Crank's Catering & Enchantment Banquet Centers and The Abbey on Main for their exceptional service too!



**Grantees in attendance, including Capac Robotics Coach John Antilla, were gifted with laptops by event sponsor, Comcast.**



## Award to address transportation needs

In December we received the good news that Four County Community Foundation was the recipient of a \$492,218 Environmental Justice Impact Grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) for our **Imlay City EV Rides project**.

We are excited at the prospect of partnering with local agencies, including the Hispanic Service Center, to offer transportation to Imlay City area residents in need of help getting to doctor's appointments, the grocery store, farmers market and more. Look for additional details about this new project in the coming months.

## Annual Sponsorships support 4CCF's work

New in 2025, Four County Community Foundation has launched an **Annual Sponsorship** campaign. Businesses, families and individuals can support the foundation's work within the community with an annual contribution.

Sponsorship dollars will be earmarked for the foundation's signature events and activities in 2025—things like our Scholarship Celebration and Night of Thanks events that connect donors with awardees; our Return to Earn internship program; financial advisor and grant writing workshops; the publication of print and email newsletters (like this one you're reading!) and Youth Advisory Committee events.

Our Annual Sponsorship program is the perfect opportunity for businesses to be recognized within the 4CCF community. The accompanying graphic shows the various sponsorship levels and the ways 4CCF will showcase supporters at upcoming events.

**Have a question or want to get your hands on a sponsorship form? Reach out to Kathy Dickens, Executive Director, at (810) 444-8852 or [kdickens@4ccf.org](mailto:kdickens@4ccf.org).**

### Sponsorship Opportunities

#### Altruistic Sponsor: \$5,000 or greater

- Podium Speaking Time at two events of your choice
- VIP Logo Placement on Table Cards at signature events and all digital marketing efforts, including E-Newsletters and the 4CCF website
- 4CCF Logo/message to use in your marketing efforts

#### Impact Sponsor: \$2,500 - \$4,999

- Podium recognition at all events
- VIP Logo placement at all events
- Logo placement on digital marketing efforts, including E-Newsletters and the 4CCF website
- 4CCF Logo/message to use in your marketing efforts

#### Empowerment Sponsor: \$1,000 - \$2,499

- Sponsor name displayed at all events
- Sponsor name and Logo featured in a post on 4CCF Facebook
- Sponsor name featured in all digital marketing efforts, including E-Newsletters and the 4CCF website
- 4CCF Logo/message to use in your marketing efforts

#### Engagement Sponsor: \$500 - \$999

- Sponsor name displayed at all events
- Sponsor name featured in all digital marketing efforts, including E-Newsletters and the 4CCF website
- 4CCF Logo/message to use in your marketing efforts



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WWW.4CCF.ORG

## March 1st is 2025 scholarship deadline

The 2025 scholarship season is upon us! **Applications are now being accepted for more than 70 different scholarships intended to help high school seniors and recent graduates already in college.** Last year, Four County Community Foundation awarded more than \$600,000 to students who've used the funds to pay for tuition, books and other fees associated with their classes.

In addition to those scholarship specific to our local school districts—Almont, Armada, Capac, Dryden, Imlay City, Memphis, Oxford, Richmond and Romeo—4CCF is home to several regional and state scholarships.

The best way to get acquainted with our scholarship program is to head to our website, [4ccf.org/scholarships](https://4ccf.org/scholarships). There you can find lists with descriptions for each of the scholarships, details about the awarding process, frequently asked questions and access to the application portal.

Once applicants fill out the general application, they'll be notified of what scholarships they're eligible for and receive instructions on the next steps they need to complete, such as submitting letters of recommendation and answering essay questions.

**Students have until 11:59 p.m. on March 1 to complete all of the required information.**

If you have a question about the application or your eligibility, please reach out to Maria Brown, Program Officer, at (810) 798-0909 or [mbrown@4ccf.org](mailto:mbrown@4ccf.org).



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