

The Bristol Observer

Main Street Foundation celebrates 20 years: Two decades of philanthropic work

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Main Street Community Foundation's President and CEO Susan Sadecki, in front, and in the back row from the left, administrative assistant Julie Matthews, Communications Manager Samantha Rajotte, and Vice President of Programs Jarre Betts are proud to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Main Street Community Foundation. Missing from the photograph is the foundation's accountant, Nicole Downes.

By LISA CAPOBIANCO
STAFF WRITER

This year, the Main Street Community Foundation has a lot to celebrate. Not only did the non-profit organization recently move to its new home on Halcyon Drive, but it also just reached a 20-year anniversary.

What began in 1995 with a community need has transformed into a community foundation that has served six communities: Bristol, Southington, Plainville, Wolcott, Burlington, and Plymouth. For fiscal year 2013, the Main Street Community Foundation had a total of \$33,107,579 assets. Within the last two years, the foundation increased assets by \$10 million, said Susan Sadecki, president and CEO of Main Street Community Foundation.

"It's been tremendous in terms of asset growth—the market has been good to us in the last few years," said Sadecki, noting how the foundation renewed its accreditation in 2012. "We're doing really well in terms of being on the right pathway to support these local communities."

"It shows that...people feel it is important to have a community foundation to help the different towns and their needs," added Jarre Betts, vice president of programs for the foundation.

In September, the foundation will celebrate its birthday during a 20th anniversary event. Although the details are still being finalized, an event committee is planning the celebration as a farm-to-table gathering scheduled for Sept. 12 at the Hill-Stead Museum.

"It's going to be an event that [will] focus on the history of the foundation, what the accomplishments have been, recognizing our founders and our donors," said Sadecki, adding that other special happenings will occur before the celebration. "There isn't a community foundation without donors."

With a new space located just 2.8 miles from its former home on Main Street, the foundation is ready to expand. The foundation's first office was a corner of the Fletcher-Terry Company office, before Webster Bank leased it (rent-free for three years) an office at 10 Main St. in 1996. In 2008, the foundation moved to 200 Main Street, sharing space with the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce and the United Way of West Central Connecticut.

Sadecki said the foundation was searching for a new location for over a year. After looking at a variety of locations, the foundation chose the 2,500-square foot space at 120 Halycon Dr. Main Street signed the lease a day before Thanksgiving before moving in January.

"We knew we outgrew the space we were in, and we were looking in terms of our strategic planning," said Sadecki. "We're excited—it's quiet, adds much more privacy for donors and our nonprofits when they come in. This type of layout fits the type of work we're involved with."

The idea of a community foundation stemmed from Bob Merriman, who worked at ND Division in Bristol, according to the foundation's website. In the early 1970s, Merriman spoke with Sherwood Anderson (one of the foundation's founders) and Ed Lorenson (also part of the founding group of leaders with a vision to establish the foundation) about encouraging local people to give back to a community foundation rather than to specific charities. After the concept of a community foundation was discussed, the founding group (which also included Hap Barnes, C. Stewart Anthony, and Terry Fletcher) decided to start such an organization when they felt there was enough money and community interest. From 1979-1980, an opportunity emerged when the Bristol Brass Corporation's president, Les Killen, and the directors, including Lorenson, decided to leave as a separate private foundation, the Bristol Brass Foundation. BFF's focus then changed to grants for capital projects and seed money for the greater Bristol area in the areas of education, social services, health, and more. Although there still was not a large enough asset base to start a community foundation at that time, BFF named a board of directors, which made semi-annual grants to local charities from 1980 until 1998. In 1993, BFF's assets were over \$1 million, and that same year, a core group of residents from the Bristol area formed to go forward with the foundation, and met monthly for two years. During that time, Lorenson, as president of Bristol Savings Bank, negotiated with Webster Bank about a merger. Under the bank merger, a condition was established so that \$500,000 of bank assets would be set aside in the Bristol Savings Bank Foundation to start a community foundation.

In the spring of 1995, Main Street Community Foundation became incorporated and Internal Revenue Service approval was secured that fall.

Sadecki said the foundation is proud of the founders' vision to "create a place that could serve as a single point of entry for...being able to satisfy the charitable goals that those individuals had for their local community."

"Our primary reason for existence is to be that philanthropic vehicle, but also to honor donor intent," said Sadecki, adding how she is proud of the foundation's board members who represent all six communities. "Every permanent gift that comes into this community foundation has to be stewarded...in a very responsible manner."

Today, the foundation has almost 200 funds. Upon request of a donor, the foundation can change the purpose of the fund.

Samantha Rajotte, communications manager of the foundation, said a donor's options are unlimited when helping the community.

"Donors can leave any type of asset to us," said Rajotte, adding how the foundation will accept gifts of any size. "They can also leave any kind of gift their will or estate plan, and it doesn't have to be just cash—it can be a gift of life insurance policy or a gift of stock."

"You can start with a small amount," said Betts. "It can grow over years."

"Our job is to make sure we're able to honor that donor's intent," added Sadecki, adding how the process of setting up a fund is simple.

Looking ahead, Sadecki said the foundation's expansion will depend on what donors would like to see in their communities. Currently, the foundation is looking to hire a program officer who has a thorough background in health care or public health, said Sadecki. The goal is to hire a program officer by April.

Sadecki said by adding a program officer to the team, the foundation will be able to explore more community projects, such as examining more of behavioral health needs.

She added community foundations are about “innovative ways” to build “strong communities.”

“Community foundations are all about convening and helping to develop collaborative solutions, and that’s what we want to be part of,” said Sadecki. “Now with some additional staff resources as well as a place we can actually host those conversations...it’s going to propel us forward and be able to respond to more community needs.”

Besides establishing funds, Main Street Community Foundation has distributed countless annual grants and scholarships. Last year, the foundation distributed \$1,056,982 in grants and scholarships to benefit a number of worthy causes and organizations in the communities it serves.

Sadecki said the foundation also is proud of its ability to build a capacity of nonprofits over the last five years, as it provides them an education series at no charge in the form of webinars and guest speakers.

“To be very deliberate about our nonprofit education was something that our board wanted us to really start getting involved with,” said Sadecki. “We believe that’s a very important role for the community foundation.”

Looking back over the last five years, another accomplishment Sadecki said the foundation is proud of is the leadership initiative undertaken by the foundation’s Board of Directors called “Money in Motion,” a discretionary fund that has existed for a couple of years now. The goal of the fund is to address challenges and respond to the emerging needs of the communities that the foundation serves. Proceeds of the 20th anniversary event will go into the Money in Motion fund.

One issue the fund has addressed is increasing awareness of technical-based career opportunities. Money in Motion has partially funded AEDAC (Adult Education Diploma and Certificate), a workforce development program launched by the Bristol Adult Education Center that provides academic and hands-on training for adult learners. A partnership between the Bristol Adult Education Center and Rowley Spring and Stamping, AEDAC allows participants to receive their high school diploma while training to be qualified for an entry level position in the manufacturing industry.

In addition, the Money in Motion allowed the foundation to fund an all-day workshop at Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology that focused on STEM and manufacturing careers for local high school students.

“We spent a lot of time talking with the Board of Education in different towns, talking to guidance counselors, making them aware that there are alternatives to a four-year college degree,” said Betts.

“The message was, let’s make sure every student had the opportunity to be economically self-sustaining—it’s a way to explore other career pathways,” said Sadecki.

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