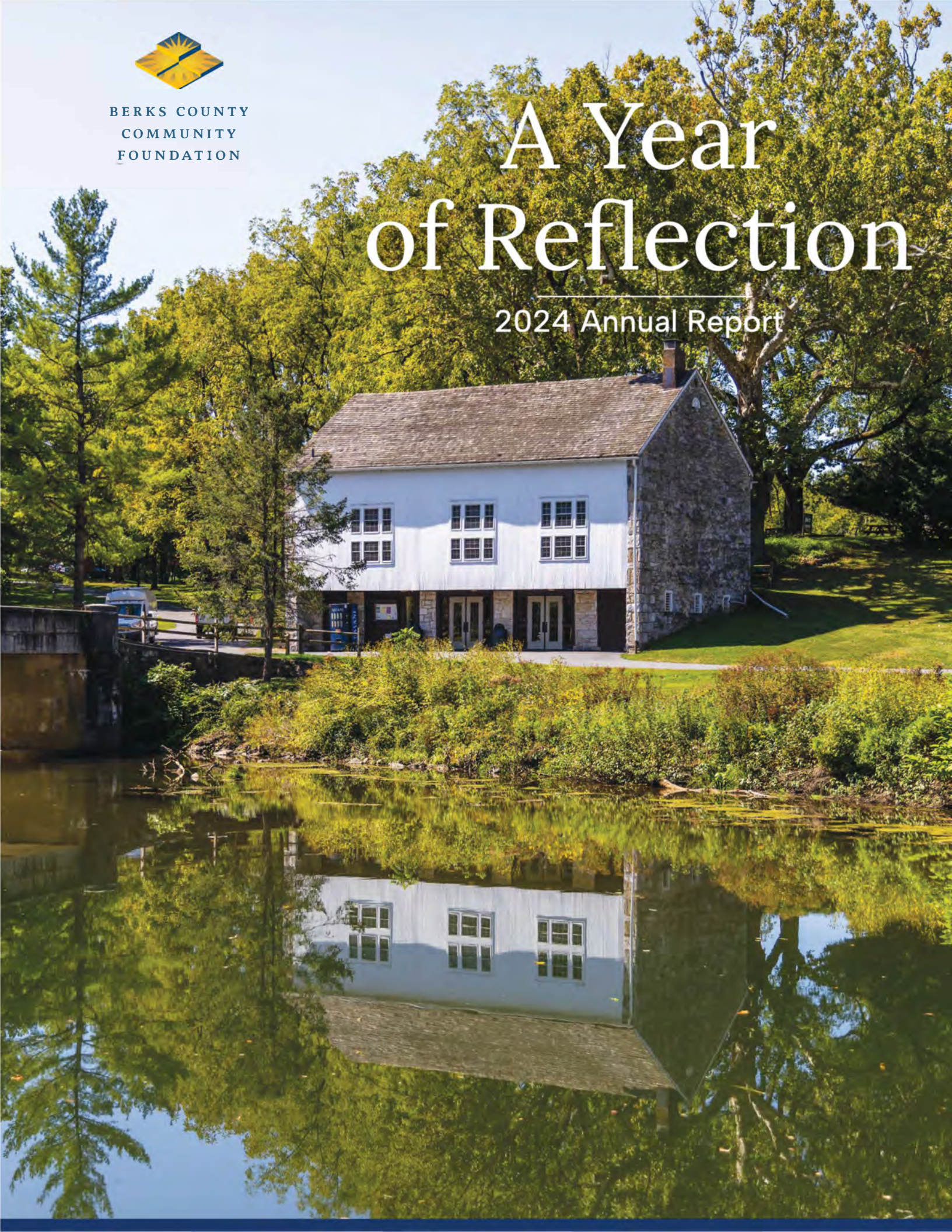




BERKS COUNTY  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

# A Year of Reflection

2024 Annual Report





# Welcome!

Welcome to Berks County Community Foundation's Annual Report, which tells the stories of our work in the last fiscal year ending June 30th, 2024.

This is a special issue, as it falls during our 30th anniversary year. Reflecting on our history, I remember serving on the Women's Counseling Services board in 1994. Through Connie Dent, the founder, we heard about Berks County Community Foundation as it was in its beginning stages. Connie was asked to donate to the Community Foundation to support the work of Women's Counseling Services. A true visionary, she took a leap of faith and donated to this new organization, while her board watched with interest as the foundation established roots in the community.

In later years, I was reintroduced to the Community Foundation when I was invited to participate on a scholarship committee, reading approximately 125 applications each year. That process gave me deep insight into the generosity of our donors and the needs, talents, and dreams of the youth in our community. It has never failed to amaze me how great the impact of even a modest scholarship is on the recipients and their families.

Over the last three decades, I have enjoyed the honor of working in my legal practice with charitably minded clients to establish funds at the Community Foundation. In every single instance, whether the client was donating the required minimum or several million dollars, each one expressed excitement, gratitude, and relief at the knowledge that

their funds were in good hands, their passions would be permanently sustained, and lives would be improved through the stewardship by the foundation.

Witnessing the satisfaction of our donors alongside the needs and gratitude of the beneficiaries of their generosity led me to rename the location of our headquarters at the corner of 3rd and Court Streets to the "corner of hopes and dreams". To me, our building in downtown Reading symbolizes our commitment to the community, the generosity of our donors, the impact our grantmaking has made, and the longevity of the Community Foundation.

A lot has happened over these past thirty years, and I am so grateful to our forward-thinking Berks Countians for placing their trust in the foundation by their giving – either by contributing to existing funds, giving unrestricted gifts to support the most pressing needs, or by creating a fund of your own to fulfill your charitable goals. Thanks to our community's support, we distributed over \$5.4 million in grants and scholarships in the last fiscal year.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan N. Denaro". The script is fluid and cursive.

Susan N. Denaro,  
Board Chair

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Cover Image: Reflecting on the view at Grings Mill Recreation Center. All photos in our annual report are courtesy of Jenn Foster of JFosterPHotography.



## At a Glance

# \$5.4 MILLION

IN GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS  
FISCAL YEAR 2024 (JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2024)

### FY24 # OF GRANTS IN EACH OF OUR AREAS OF FOCUS



**310**

Health & Human Services



**389**

Education



**34**

Arts & Culture



**65**

Neighborhood &  
Economic Development



**47**

Environment &  
Energy

### IN OUR 30-YEAR HISTORY, WE HAVE RECEIVED

**\$175,904,008**

IN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM

**16,578**

DONORS AND HAVE DISTRIBUTED

**\$84,745,264**

IN GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

# \$142,411,799

TOTAL ASSETS





—  
**Kevin K. Murphy,**  
President

# Dear Friends,

2024 has provided many opportunities to reflect on the 30th anniversary of the founding of Berks County Community Foundation. Our “30 Days for 30 Years” social media campaign in June highlighted some of our proudest moments and elicited great engagement from our followers. I heard from many of you who were happy to read about our accomplishments and proud to see how far we have come. Thank you for reaching out to me to share those stories.

The Community Foundation’s start rested on the shoulders of the business and civic leaders whose idea was to strengthen our community while creating a place where people could establish funds and make gifts in perpetuity to benefit the community. Those visionary thinkers on our steering committee and original board of directors paved the way for the foundation to make connections and grow over time.

Berks County and the Community Foundation have come a long way since our founding in 1994. Our staff has grown from one employee to thirteen, including new positions in the past three years to deepen our impact in grantmaking and philanthropic services. Our team now manages over \$140 million in assets and close to 400 funds that award grants and scholarships. Over \$84 million has been distributed to the community since our founding in June of 1994, thanks to the foresight of our founders and the generosity of our donors.

Our work isn’t just about working with donors to establish funds. Nor is it only about awarding grants and scholarships. The team at the Community Foundation convenes local leaders, researches national and local trends, and chooses initiatives on which to focus so community conversations get moving and big ideas are discussed.



Change starts with a spark.  
Your spark.



Our team works hard to bring organizations and individuals together to collaborate and spark positive change, to provide more opportunities for nonprofits to thrive, and to inspire our residents to give to the causes about which they care the most. This year's Annual Report tells some of the stories of impact made possible by the generosity of this community.

A lot has changed in 30 years, but our mission to promote philanthropy and improve the quality of life for the residents of Berks County will never change. Thank you for being a part of our history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kevin K. Murphy'.

Kevin K. Murphy,  
President



**1,517 donations  
in FY24**

**382 charitable  
funds managed**



**12 new funds  
created**

**11 mini-grants  
to Berks County  
Schools**







Community volunteers prepare for the MOM-N-PA event at the Santander Arena. The event floor was transformed into a dental clinic for a two-day event.

## Transforming Smiles, Empowering Lives: The Impact of MOM-N-PA's Dental Outreach

The annual MOM-N-PA dental clinic has become essential for thousands of Pennsylvanians in need of affordable dental care. Traveling to different communities in the state, MOM-N-PA dedicates itself to relieving pain and infection for underserved patients who might otherwise seek care in a hospital emergency room. The volunteer dentists also teach patients how to prevent dental disease and attempt to refer patients for follow-up care. For over a decade, this extraordinary event has brought together a dedicated team of volunteer dentists, hygienists, and community members to give life-changing services

to those who would otherwise struggle to access proper oral healthcare. In 2024, MOM-N-PA made its way to the City of Reading.

The two-day dental clinic was held on June 21 and June 22, 2024. The goal was to transform the Santander Arena in downtown Reading with 130 portable dental chairs, accompanying equipment, and over 1,000 volunteers including dental professionals and lay volunteers from all over the state. MOM-N-PA picks different communities each year to host their free dental clinic; the last time they came to Reading was in 2018.

"Here we were, standing side by side, working together and doing what we've been trained to do, providing necessary dental care to those in greatest need," said Dr. Lew Lampiris, reflecting on his experience as a volunteer.

A large percentage of the potential dental patients often go to hospitals for emergency treatment, and since most hospitals do not have a dentist on staff, they provide patients with a pain reliever and possibly an antibiotic. With only this temporary fix, the patient is likely to return to the hospital and can end up with a more serious condition. The health screening provided by the



*“Even the most nervous will have the very best care and excellent service.”*

A participant of MOM-N-PA

dental clinic will uncover any untreated chronic disease. The 2024 MOM-N-PA clinic provided root canals, extractions, restorations, cleanings, and partial or full denture services to over 1,500 people in the two-day span. Close to 10,000 procedures were performed valued at more than \$1.25 million in free dental care.

The Home Health Care Foundation Fund and the Jay and Elaine Rosenson Fund of Berks County Community Foundation are two of the many sources from which MOM-N-PA received funding. Corporate sponsors also offered support, including Highmark Foundation and United Concordia Dental. MOM-N-PA also partnered with Berks County Dental Society, the Pennsylvania Dental Association and United Way of Berks, exemplifying a true model of collaborative philanthropy.

“Without the help of our sponsors, dedicated volunteers, and everyone else who has supported us throughout the years, we wouldn’t have been able to reach this incredible milestone of serving our 10,000th patient,” said Dr. Bernie Dishler, event organizer.



Patients started lining up as early as 4:00 am on the first day. Since patients were seen on a first come, first serve basis, appointments were unnecessary. No patient was required to show proof of insurance, as services were free. The staff gave each family attending with children a wristband and attended to them together in groups. Every patient seen during the dental clinic received a post-visit form that included a local dentist for follow-up services.

Health and Human Services Program Officer, Cindy Milian and Bernie Dishler, event organizer were pleased with the two-day event that provided free dental care to over 1,500 people.

“I truly appreciated your dental services,” said a recipient of care. “I had an infected, painful tooth that needed to be pulled, but I didn’t have the money to do it. Everyone was so kind...I really expected to get dirty looks or be rushed through because it was free. But that wasn’t the way it was. Everyone was so polite, smiling, and made me feel like they cared.”



The success of MOM-n-PA is dependent not only on the quality of care provided but also on the genuine compassion and respect shown to everyone who walks through the doors. Our goal is to ensure that our community has access to the healthcare and quality of life services it needs to function at its best. Managing and distributing funding to be able to provide these services from funds that were created by generous donors in the community embodies our mission statement. Learn more about these funds by emailing Cindy Milian, Health and Human Services Program Officer at [cindym@bccf.org](mailto:cindym@bccf.org).



# ☀ Digging into Urban Agriculture: A Tour of Green Spaces and Community Gardens in Reading



Participants of the Greater Reading Urban AG group are sowing the seeds of community at their journey through the garden at Berks Nature.

If you have ever wondered how agriculture can thrive in the city of Reading, you're not alone. The Berks Agricultural Resource Network (B.A.R.N.) partnered with Greater Reading Urban Ag Group and offered a bus tour to showcase how community gardens and green spaces are being redefined by the city. This tour provided an exciting opportunity to explore the concept of urban agriculture firsthand. B.A.R.N. is a non-profit organization formed in 2008 to serve the Berks County Agricultural and related food industries and rural communities.

Thanks to the Innovation Fund of Berks County Community Foundation, the tour was offered at no cost for community members. Tour guests ranged from seasoned gardeners to curious city dwellers. There were nine sites visited on the day of the tour. Participants learned the history behind and intended purpose of each location. They engaged in answering questions from the tour guides and even experienced harvesting a few vegetables.

"I have always been interested in plants and gardening, so I thought that this experience could help me learn some new techniques or skills to improve my gardening," commented one of the attendees.

Each stop lasted about forty minutes, during which each garden leader shared their experiences on creating and managing the gardens. The goal of the tour was to provide individuals with information, meet new friends, and hopefully grow some interest in planting their own gardens.



Attendees were given a map and description of each of the spaces below:

- Bog Turtle Creek Farm, 712 High Blvd., Reading, PA 19607
- Cultivating Community Garden, 1040 Liggett Avenue, Reading, PA 19611
- Buttonwood Community Garden, Corner of Buttonwood and Division Street, Reading PA 19601
- GoggleWorks Gardens at Lauer's Park, 247 Walnut Street, Reading, PA 19601
- Kennedy Towers Reading Housing Authority, 300 South 4th Street, Reading PA 19602
- The Zen Den, 311 Pearl Street, Reading, PA 19602
- Lucky's Lane, 339 South 7th Street, Reading, PA 19602
- Real Food Farm LLC., 501 South 9th St, Reading, PA 19602
- Berks Nature Teaching Garden, 575 St. Bernardine Street, Reading, PA 19607

The tour was designed to educate the community about urban agriculture and why it matters. Urban agriculture is becoming a movement with profound benefits for the city of Reading. By growing food locally, the city can reduce its dependence on external food sources and build more resilience to supply chain disruptions.

A participant who attended the tour explained why they wanted to be part of the event, "I was interested in learning more about how people can create greenspaces and community gardens in urban areas and how they use food and nature to connect with the city of Reading."

The environment is impacted by these urban gardens and green spaces which help mitigate the effects of climate change by lowering carbon footprints and managing stormwater runoff. These initiatives also create spaces for residents to connect, collaborate, and build a sense of community.

The Innovation Fund was created in 2023 to provide grants for projects focused on improving environmental health and climate resiliency in Berks County. Projects that include collaboration across sectors and/or opportunities for partnership building will be prioritized.

Emily Smedley, Environment and Energy Program Officer, and participants unearth fresh insights at Bog Turtle Creek Farm.



Emily Smedley, Environment and Energy Program Officer manages grantmaking and initiatives related to environment health, sustainable energy, land use, and neighborhood vitality. At the foundation, we are always looking to expand our environmental grant making. We know that our residents really value outdoor spaces and outdoor recreation. To learn more about Emily's work, email her at [emilys@bccf.org](mailto:emilys@bccf.org).





# Reviving Local Voices: Spotlight PA's Commitment to Berks County Journalism

Local news is in crisis. The rapid decline of news outlets across the country greatly diminishes access to trusted, contextual, factual news. In 2022, Berks County Community Foundation convened several local and regional media outlets to discuss the question: How can we improve local journalism in Berks County?

The consensus of the group was to build on the success of Spotlight PA's State

College news bureau by establishing a news bureau in Berks County. Spotlight PA, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit newsroom based out of Harrisburg, was founded in 2019 and is dedicated to investigative and public service journalism for Pennsylvania.

"The idea of the Berks County news bureau took off when we saw the success of the State College bureau," Monica Reyes, Vice President for

Programs and Initiatives at the Community Foundation. "Spotlight PA has demonstrated that their nonprofit journalism model works at local scales, and with the diminished capacity for journalism across the county and state, we knew this was a chance worth taking."

The Community Foundation made a grant of \$135,000 to Spotlight PA to conduct a community study and a

Members of local and regional media outlets identified critical issues that are important to the local community.





funding study to determine whether it was feasible for Spotlight PA to create a news bureau in Berks County. Heather Adams, executive director and managing editor at Berks Community Television (BCTV), took a sabbatical to lead the planning process along with a nine-person advisory committee.

The community study, which included input from more than 1,000 Berks County residents, showed an overwhelming need for more in-depth, trustworthy local reporting in Berks County. Community members participating in the study said there is a substantial and growing lack of access to reliable local information which negatively affects their ability to be engaged, informed citizens. The funding feasibility study showed that the current philanthropic landscape can meet or exceed Spotlight PA's goal of \$650,000 per year through support from foundations, corporations and individuals.

"We're pursuing a news bureau in Berks County because the community has asked for it," said Christopher Baxter, CEO and president of Spotlight PA. "We can see from a news and information perspective that the county could benefit from more journalism, especially investigative, accountability, and public-service reporting. But that alone isn't enough for us to open a new bureau. We wanted to know the community was



## What do we need to do to improve Berks County's local journalism?

- ▶ Elevate issues of local and regional concern to a statewide audience
- ▶ Obtain robust and accessible resources that connect communities
- ▶ Expand audience numerically and demographically
- ▶ Build trust

## What does local journalism need?

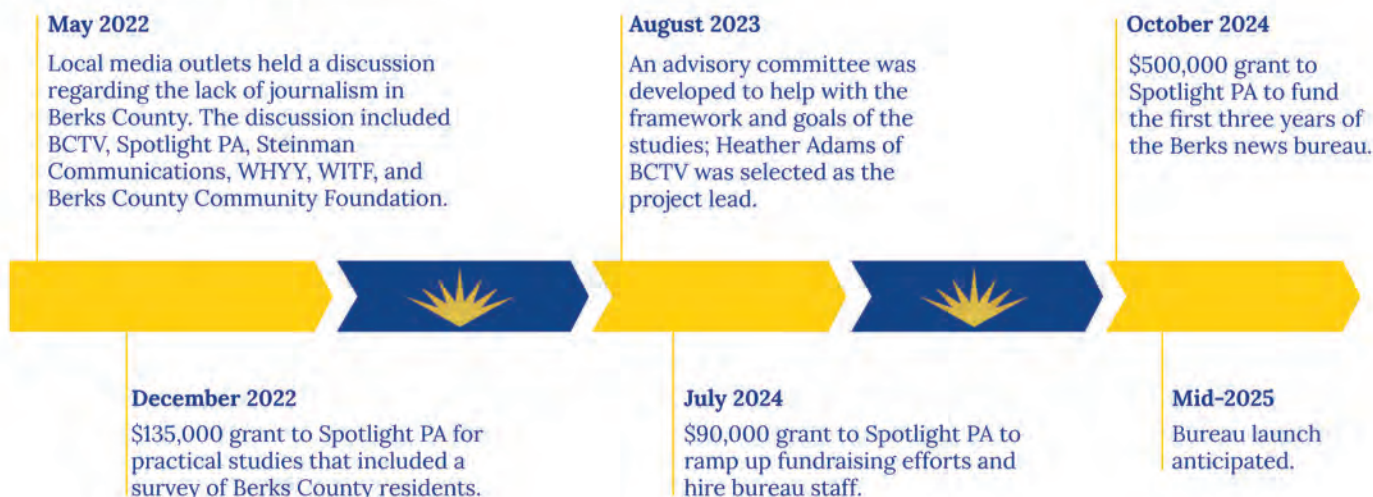
- ▶ An approach that involves community listening to help us define beats and priority areas to tailor coverage
- ▶ More intense and comprehensive coverage of arts and culture, local storytelling, municipal and school board meetings/issues, and hyperlocal investigative journalism



Heather Adams, Project Lead, (right) watches as a team member from the advisory committee provides insight to help with the framework and goals of the studies.



## Spotlight PA Timeline



invested in the kind of journalism we produce, understands its importance, and will rally behind it.”

When the planning studies were completed and the possibility of a Berks County news bureau came into clearer focus, the Community Foundation made an additional \$90,000 grant to support Spotlight PA in preparation for the bureau launch. This grant allowed Spotlight PA to recruit and onboard bureau staff, conduct marketing efforts to generate buzz around the launch of the bureau, and fundraise specifically to individuals and businesses.

The news bureau’s anticipated launch in 2025 will include an editor, three journalists, and a community partnership coordinator.

As the launch date nears, Baxter reflects on the impact it will have on the county: “I think when we look back after these first three years, the media landscape will have significantly shifted. I think you’ll see more collaboration, a greater elevation of issues and discussions vital to this region, and, most importantly, more and better journalism. I think you’ll also see historic levels of new philanthropic investment in the news, a recognition that the kind of journalism Spotlight PA produces is essential to the health and well-being of a community.”

Funding for this project came from the Hawley and Myrtle Quier Fund of Berks County Community Foundation, the purpose of which is to fund initiatives that improve the quality of life for the residents of Berks County. This fund

was established by the late former chair of the board emeritus of Reading Eagle, Myrtle Quier, on behalf of her husband Hawley, former publisher of Reading Eagle and the Reading Times.





# Welcome New Funds

## Berks County Vietnam Memorial Maintenance Fund

This fund will provide support for the overall maintenance of the Berks County Vietnam War Memorial located in City Park in honor of the memory of men and women of Berks County who died or were named missing in action in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War.

## BISA Attendance Improvement Fund

This fund will support initiatives at Berks County's public schools that improve attendance.

## Building Justice in Berks Fund

This fund will support research on Berks County's jail population.

## Cathy and Doug Weaver Fund

This fund supports animal welfare, the environment, and/or health and human services in Berks County.

## Christine Louise Rebman-Roller Memorial Fund

The Community Foundation administers memorial funds to help families who want to do something charitable in their loved one's memory. Over time, Christine's family will determine how donations made to this fund can best benefit the community and honor Christine's memory.

## Foundation for the Reading Pagoda Restoration Fund

This fund supports the restoration of the Reading Pagoda.

## Julia Carroll Memorial Fund for German Shorthaired Pointer Rescue

This fund will provide financial support to German Shorthaired Pointer Rescue PA, Inc. to help offset medical costs for dogs rescued by the agency.

## Manassas and Annie Solt Memorial Fund

Distributions from the fund will benefit Stahl Pottery Preservation Society, Huff's Union Church and Make a Wish Foundation.

## Reading Public Library Foundation Endowment Fund

This fund will benefit the Reading Public Library Foundation.

## Royals Youth Hockey Fund

This fund will provide financial support for youth to participate in ice hockey lessons, camps, clinics, or leagues.

## The Scholl Albright College Fund

Distributions of up to \$1 million will be designated to Albright College to be used to fund the renovation of the locker rooms in the Bollman Center.

## Donors generally create one of the following types of funds:

### ► Undesignated Funds

Some donors establish Undesignated Funds, where grants are made to address critical issues in the community, as determined by the Community Foundation's Board of Directors. These grantmaking programs and initiatives evolve and develop over time to meet the emerging needs of the people who live and work in the county. Our expert program officers oversee these initiatives.

### ► Field of Interest Funds

Field of Interest Funds allow donors to support areas of interest, such as education, animal welfare, or the arts. Sometimes the Community Foundation will establish an advisory committee of expert volunteers to guide the distribution of grants.

### ► Designated Funds

Grants from Designated Funds are made regularly to nonprofit agencies that you designate when you set up the fund. Some donors endow a Designated Fund in their will by leaving a charitable bequest to provide annual support to an agency. Sometimes agencies create their own funds to provide everlasting support.

### ► Scholarship and Award Funds

Scholarships and awards are granted based on specific selection criteria that donors determine when they establish the fund. In many cases, there may be a way to support educational causes in other ways, too, such as through a Field of Interest fund.

### ► Donor Advised Funds

With a Donor Advised Fund, you recommend grants over time to organizations and causes that interest you. Some donors pick family members to serve on an advisory committee that makes the grant recommendations. Many donors set up Donor Advised Funds instead of private foundations. In most cases, Donor Advised Funds offer significant tax and administrative advantages over private foundations.

Scan to learn how to create your own fund.







From left to right: Steven Scholl and his uncle, John Scholl.

## In the Business of Giving Back

### The Early Years

**J**ohn Scholl was born on August 24, 1947, at St. Joe's Hospital on 13th Street in Reading, the youngest of two boys. His brother, William, who passed away in December of 2023, was four years his senior. John's father, William, graduated from Temple University and worked as a pharmacist for his entire career. John's mother, Emily, was a homemaker and part-time bookkeeper for Bertolette Candies, owned by Walter Lechleitner. They moved around a bit – to Pottstown for a few years before settling in Shillington – and John graduated from Governor Mifflin in 1965.

### High School – A Talented Athlete Emerges

Sports have been a huge part of John's life since elementary school, and he excelled on youth teams. He played baseball until a teacher cut him from the team for being the class clown. John switched gears and tried out for the track team. "I did the broad jump, pole vault and high jump. By the time I was a senior in high school, I was number 2 in high jump, so I had a nice track career."

### College years

As a freshman at Albright College, John started playing basketball and became

a star player. "Basketball was my main sport – I was on the track team the first two years and played baseball the last two years, but I played basketball all four years." Basketball was a part of John's life until he was in his 60s, playing in pick-up games and adult leagues throughout his adult life.

### A Budding Businessman

"Ever since I was in high school, I always wanted to be in business for myself. I didn't care if it was a gas station or a candy store – I just wanted to work for myself." That ambition drove the decisions that led to a successful career in the home-building industry.



# Change starts with a spark.

Your spark.



"For two summers during college, I worked for John A. Beard in his office – they knew me from playing basketball. My mother did that company's books. There were a lot of Albright grads working there at the time. After I got my accounting degree from Albright in 1969, John offered me a full-time job."

While working full-time for John A. Beard, one of the partners, Dick Weidman, took a liking to John and taught him a lot about the business. John was honest from the start about his desire to move out on his own soon, and Dick gave him some great advice. "Dick said, 'I just want to tell you one thing. There are no bad businesses, only bad businessmen.' That stuck with me. He said you could have a clothing store that goes out of business, and the next guy buys it and makes it the best clothing store in the area. My success was up to me."

While working 60 or 70 hours per week at the accounting firm and doing bookkeeping on the side for various clients, John took a job as an accountant and salesperson for Berks Construction Company which had a home-building business called Ridge Homes. John quickly learned the ins and outs of the business, and when the owners decided to sell, John decided to buy the business and work closely with a co-worker,

Stanley Ball. The two eventually went into custom home building, a career that spanned decades.

## Building Business

Property by property, bit by bit, John built his business while establishing his track record in the community. Early investments were made thanks to help from chance encounters with people who knew John from his time playing basketball at Albright. One night over drinks at Clover Park AA Men's Club, John ran into an Albright alumnus who knew of John because of his success on the court and offered to help John with the financing to close his first big real estate deal – buying some lots in a new development. "We got to talking. I had this deal half-closed, but I needed money. He financed me and got me started. It was successful for both of us – we both made money." That success meant that John could now secure bank loans, and his business grew.

Working long hours, and playing sports at night and on the weekends, John started to get burned out. John got out of the custom home-building business when he was about 40 years old. "I had a lot of properties and enough money for me."

John Scholl started to think about philanthropy. He established The

Scholl Foundation with the help of Tom Williams, a local CPA. John eventually found the government regulations and fees for a private foundation expensive and complicated. Soon after Berks County Community Foundation was established, John worked with Franki Aitken, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer, to set up a donor advised fund at the Community Foundation.

"I came in and talked to Franki and said that I'd like to set something up." He appreciates how easy the process has been for him. "You take care of everything, and all I to do is give the money and say where I want it to go. Every year I always give the maximum that I can give according to the federal government. Then, I call Franki and say, 'Send this amount of money to Albright or Reading Hospital' or to whatever I am interested in doing, and it is so easy."

## The Next Generation

Steven Scholl, John's nephew, has fond memories of his uncle from his childhood. "I remember at a young age always being drawn to him and looking forward to seeing him. He'd ask me trivia questions about sports or the rules of baseball or football or basketball. He's always been a teacher to me."



*We meet our mission by  
helping people create charitable funds,  
managing the money in those funds,  
and distributing grants and  
scholarships to benefit  
the community.*



Later, Steven would learn from John by watching him at the homebuilders' show that used to be held at the Berkshire Mall. "I would watch how he interacted with people. I remember always being amazed at how many people he knew. When I was 16, 17, and 18 years old, I lived with him so I could attend Governor Mifflin High School to play sports, since my parents lived in the Schuylkill Valley School District. I didn't realize until later what a huge sacrifice that was for him. Here was a guy in his 40s, free to come and go and do whatever he pleased, but he decided to take me in and have a big role in raising me." Little did Steven know that this time would help him in business, later in his life.

In 2013, John had open heart surgery and needed help with his business. Steven offered to help and has been involved ever since, taking over the daily property management operations and growing the business. "He's very talented – he can build a house from the ground up. He's good at financing and paperwork and all that kind of stuff, which is difficult. I still do the bookkeeping, but one day he'll have to take care of that. He's the perfect match for me."

Looking back, those early experiences are priceless for Steven. "I have had so many times when I called on some of these people I was introduced to by John, and they went out of their way to help me. It was then I realized how much respect they gave him. While he was tough, he treated people fairly. This may be the number one lesson he taught me. "Take

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***"My funds are  
eventually going to  
help a lot of people—  
that's why I like to  
give back."***

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**John Scholl**

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care of people and they'll take care of you," he said. This stuck with me, and I've tried to live my life that way...always try to do the right thing."

John later experienced two cardiac arrests – one in 2018 and another in 2023. He is still involved in the business, although his time in real estate is winding down. He relies on Steve to handle most of the business. Steve is grateful for John's trust and the opportunities he has given him. "I tell everybody, without him, I would be nowhere. Not just the financial part, but the mentoring part, too. If there is one big takeaway from this, it is that he has been my mentor probably a lot more than he'll ever know. There is no possible way I could repay him for everything he has done for me. I'd have to live 100 lifetimes. I never want to disappoint him, and I go to great lengths to ensure that doesn't happen. I often tell people that my father raised me to be tough, to have grit, and to never give up, and John taught me how to use that toughness and grit in the world. Losing him one day will create an enormous void in my life, and I dread when that happens. In the meantime, all I can do is to continue living my life by the example he set and taught me."

John is proud of his funds at the Community Foundation and wishes he could do more. "My funds are eventually going to help a lot of people – that's why I like to give back."



Steven will step in as the advisor to the donor advised fund upon John's passing, per John's wishes. When asked how he feels about that, Steven reflected, "We share the same values, the same ideas on how things should be. To me, it's just a matter of continuing his legacy. I'm just steering the wheel, that's it."

For more information about establishing funds at the Community Foundation, please contact Molly McCullough Robbins, Vice President for Philanthropic Services: [mollyr@bccf.org](mailto:mollyr@bccf.org) | 610-685-2223.

—  
John Scholl and Steven Scholl.



Berks County Community Foundation helps people determine the type of fund that best suits their charitable goals. Nearly all our funds are customized to help our donors achieve their philanthropic vision.

John Scholl chose to establish a donor advised fund and a designated fund to fulfill his charitable goals. His designated fund will support a specific nonprofit, and his donor advised fund allows him – and, eventually, his nephew, Steven – to select the organizations and causes that are important to him. John consults with the Community Foundation regularly about where he wants to direct his support. This approach has worked well for him, and he has placed his trust in his nephew to make decisions about the fund once he passes away.







## Embracing a New Chapter: A Retiree's Journey Back to School

**R**etirement often signifies a time of reflection and a well-deserved break from decades of hard work. But for some, like Loretta Boyd, retirement is merely the beginning of a new chapter. At 78, Loretta decided to trade in her retirement for a new academic adventure. Loretta's decision to return to school wasn't a spur of the moment decision. It was carefully considered, influenced by her daughter, Kristin, and her grandson, TJ.

Loretta had retired from a career that included roles as a Nurse Manager and a Director of Obstetrics, but she wasn't ready to fully retire yet. One day, when Loretta planned to run errands with Kristin and TJ, they took a detour to Reading Area Community College (RACC). Loretta decided to enroll as a student majoring in healthcare in Medical Coding and Billing.

"Having retired after 50 years as a Registered Nurse, I decided to transition into another healthcare field. I feel I still have much to give to the medical field in another capacity such as coding and billing," Loretta explained.

Returning to school was not as simple as filling out an application and enrolling in classes. Loretta faced some challenges that included financial concerns, applying for scholarships and returning to the classroom as a non-traditional student.

"Loretta's decision to go back to school is a reminder that learning knows no age limit. The decision to pursue education after retirement exemplifies the community of life-long learners that the Community Foundation proudly supports," said Kim Sheffer, Lifelong Learning Program Officer at the foundation.

The Community General Hospital Foundation June A. Roedel Healthcare Scholarship Fund provides financial support to residents of Berks County who undertake or further their career in healthcare by providing scholarship funds for their educational expenses. In 2024, this fund granted over \$93,000 in scholarships including Loretta's.

Residents of Berks County are eligible to apply if they will be attending an

accredited educational institution pursuing a career in healthcare, with a career goal of fulfilling a local community need involving patient care.





Going back to school for Loretta brought new challenges that she was not expecting. At times, she would lose focus and would feel discouraged. She found support in her bible study group and in the book titled *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (Dr. Seuss, 1990), given to her by her family. On each page of the book, a family member wrote a note to remind her of her goals. Loretta's career goal is to find employment in either a hospital or physician's office. She says, "By being a medical coding specialist, I will be able to ensure that the patient medical records are complete and accurate when being sent for payment. Having accuracy in the records will assist the revenue cycle in the hospital or physician's office. It will also decrease the need for repeat submissions to insurance companies." Loretta achieved Dean's List while taking four courses each semester with an anticipated graduation date of May 2025.

Kim Sheffer, Lifelong Learn Program Officer, pictured with Loretta Boyd, scholarship recipient. Loretta is attending RACC to study Medical Coding and Billing thanks to a scholarship from the June A. Roedel Healthcare Scholarship Fund of Berks County Community Foundation.





## The Literacy Council's Path of Empowering Individuals to Break Barriers

A new initiative is changing lives one word at a time. In March of 2024, the Literacy Council of Reading-Berks launched its Overcoming Barriers Project. The goal of this project is to provide resources such as bus passes to enable female program participants the opportunity to participate in Literacy Council classes. Students will learn to read and write proficiently, become productive citizens, prepare for work, and achieve success at their jobs.

The Literacy Council of Reading-Berks is dedicated to eradicating illiteracy by teaching students to develop job skills, become a better parent, and to give back to the community. Their mission is to help adults better communicate, collaborate, and contribute to their families, workplaces, and communities.

The Overcoming Barriers Project addresses a critical need in our community. The classes go beyond reading and writing; they're stepping-stones to helping these females break barriers that are preventing them from being successful. The program provides a monthly BARTA bus pass for English as a Second Language (ESL) students, high school equivalency certification classes, GED preparation materials and exam fees, and a gateway to citizenship program.

"The answer to being productive in life, work, and the community is the ability to communicate, collaborate with, and contribute to others," explains Beverly



From left to right: Gail Landis, POP member, and Cindy Milian, Health and Human Services Program Officer, (in blue) review classroom workbooks with the teaching staff at Literacy Council of Reading - Berks.

Hirneisen of the Literacy Council.

"Those who are illiterate find that impossible to do."

The Power of the Purse (POP) Fund of Berks County Community Foundation provided support for the Overcoming Barriers Project.

"The Power of the Purse Fund's support is invaluable," says Beverly Hirneisen. "It allows us to focus on what we do best - teaching literacy skills - while ensuring our female students have the means to attend classes regularly."

As women improve their literacy skills, they become more effective advocates for themselves and for children in



schools and other public institutions. The program also serves as a gateway to higher education and increased community involvement.

“Women benefit in earnings from increased literacy skills,” Hirneisen notes. “Participation in literacy programs leads to a significant increase in participation in other community organizations.”

The Literacy Council's efforts are already bearing fruit. Students are progressing through ESL class levels, passing GED exams, and even gaining U.S. citizenship. These achievements are measured through post-testing results, exam passing rates, and tracking students' progression through various educational levels.

One of the partners of the Literacy Council is Reading Area Community College (RACC). The partnership with a community college is crucial. Literacy Council helps RACC with professional development, student transfers, the Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, and admission assistance. The Council also provides ESL and high school equivalency classes through Berks Latino Workforce Development Corporation, and Connections Work.

The Overcoming Barriers Project is more than just a literacy program; it's a program that provides hope. The impact of this program is immense. For each woman who learns to read, write, and communicate effectively, the program is not just changing one life—it is transforming families and strengthening our entire community.

The Literacy Council of Reading-Berks, through its Overcoming Barriers Project, is writing a new chapter in

the story of Berks County. It's a tale of empowerment, resilience, and the power of lifelong learning.



POP is a women's giving circle with a focus on providing grants to programs that break the cycle of poverty by eliminating or addressing barriers for Berks County girls and women who want to enter or re-enter the workforce or seek the education they need to do so. In 2024, POP awarded a total of \$75,000 to the following organizations:

- ▶ **Connections Work:** \$10,000 for a program to provide transportation, ID's, and work-related clothing to remove any barriers to employment for individuals with justice involvement.
- ▶ **Hannah's Hope:** \$8,500 for staff training in Trauma Informed Care.
- ▶ **John Paul II Center for Special Learning:** \$3,000 for their Girl Talk 101 program that creates a safe space for female students ages 10-45 with any disability to talk about their bodies, rights, safety, and self-advocacy with staff and community experts.
- ▶ **Literacy Council of Reading:** \$5,000 to supply resources such as bus passes to enable female participants the opportunity to participate in Literacy Council classes.
- ▶ **Mary's Shelter:** \$3,750 to provide housing and supportive services to homeless unaccompanied youth.
- ▶ **Opportunity House:** \$15,000 to offer financial assistance to empower women and ensure entry into permanent housing.
- ▶ **Reading Science Center:** \$10,000 to provide STEM opportunities through hands-on programming for girls in Berks County.
- ▶ **Safe Berks:** \$15,000 to help eliminate barriers that survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault face in obtaining and/or maintaining employment by providing direct support and financial assistance for education and employment needs.
- ▶ **VOiCEup Berks:** \$4,750 to send Berks County youth to a national youth leadership conference to foster leadership skills.

To learn how you can get involved in POP, contact Molly Robbins, Vice President of Philanthropic Services at [mollyr@bccf.org](mailto:mollyr@bccf.org).





## What do Baseball and Church Have in Common?

**F**irst United Church of Christ, the historic Reading church that was involved in the founding of some fourteen First Reformed churches in Berks County, conducted its final worship service in 2016 after 263 years of ministry. Upon the church's closing, First UCC gave their building to Reading City Church and transferred the church's \$800,000 endowment to Berks County Community Foundation. The First United Church of Christ Mission Fund was established at the Community Foundation in 2017 as a result of the endowment gift.

Each year, the Community Foundation distributes grants with the church's intent in mind. Grants include support for organizations that benefit children

or senior citizens or reduce hunger. This fund also supports activities for children who would not have access due to a financial burden.

This is where Reading Youth Legion Baseball enters the picture. Javier Garcia, a long-time coach and teacher for Reading School District, saw the need for a summer youth baseball program. "Teaching for the past decade, I know firsthand the economic disadvantages our families face. Back in 2021, the kids wanted somewhere to play. I said I would do all the paperwork to get it started, if you get the kids to show up. Reading Legion was created to give the kids a place to play summer baseball and to develop their skills."

The mission of Reading Youth Legion Baseball is to provide an opportunity for children in Reading to play baseball. Javier initially received support for baseball equipment through online fundraisers and was given hand-me-down uniforms and access to the baseball field by the Reading School District. He then applied for a grant from the First United Church of Christ Mission Fund of Berks County Community Foundation. "Thanks to the grant, Reading Legion can field a team to compete in the Berks County American Senior Legion Baseball league. The grant helps make it possible for kids to play, because it covers the cost of umpires, equipment, and uniforms." Coach Javier has since expanded the program to create a junior legion team

—  
Young athletes running off the field have gratitude for this free program.







Program officers Emily Smedley and Cindy Milian stand alongside Reading Legion Youth Baseball coaches. They know the importance of why the league was created—to give kids a place to play summer baseball and develop their skills.

that consists of fifteen kids from ages 13 to 16, many of them first-time players.

The program not only provides a valuable way for the participants to spend their time, but they're also learning about what it takes to compete. Javier said, "This summer, we went 14-4 and lost the County Championship 1-0 to Kutztown." It was the first time since 1974 that Reading had a legion team in the county final; they secured a spot in the PA American Legion Regional 2 tournament.

"This grant shows that a small amount of money can change people's lives in big ways. The young adults participating in the summer league get to continue a sport they love and learn commitment and sportsmanship. With each grant from the First United Church of Christ Mission fund, we are able to live out the mission of the church and continue its legacy forever – in this case, one hit at a time." said Emily Smedley, Berks County Community Foundation's Environment & Energy program officer who manages this fund.



Sometimes, churches are forced to make the painful decision to close their doors due to insurmountable financial issues. That was the case with the First United Church of Christ, who chose to work with the Community Foundation to transfer their remaining assets for the benefit of the community.

In other cases, church leaders can find support from programs like New Dollars/New Partners. Berks County Community Foundation is hosting this program in collaboration with Partners for Sacred Places, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit that brings people together to find creative ways to maintain and make the most of America's older and historic houses of worship.

Local congregations, spanning denominations, locations, sizes, and missions recently had the opportunity to focus on building capacity to better serve their communities as anchor institutions - nurturing transformation, and shaping vibrant, creative communities. The following Berks County churches participated in the six-month cohort to gain these valuable tools: Bausman United Church of Christ (Wyomissing), Charis Community Church (Reading), Robesonia United Church of Christ (Robesonia), Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church (Muhlenberg area), and Holy Cross United Methodist Church (Reading).

Funding for this project came from James P. Born, Sr. Fund of Berks County Community Foundation. The fund supports local houses of worship, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive programs for all children, including those who are underprivileged. For more information, please contact Emily Smedley at [emilys@bccf.org](mailto:emilys@bccf.org).





# The Power of Summer Learning at Mifflin Summer Zone

When the school year ends for summer, many students expect the freedom of a break. Educators and parents alike worry about the “summer slide” - the loss of academic skills and knowledge during the long vacation. Enter the Mifflin Summer Zone, an innovative program that’s turning summer into a season of growth, creativity, and exploration for students in the Governor Mifflin School District.

Mifflin Summer Zone is not your average summer camp. It’s a carefully crafted program designed to combat summer learning loss through high-interest, high-energy activities aligned with the district’s curriculum. Beth Stanislawczyk of the Governor Mifflin Education Foundation explains, “Summer Zone gives students K-12 an opportunity to enjoy high-interest topics or take advantage of academic preparation zones that will help set them up for success in the year ahead. It is led by teachers in a camp-like setting.”

Funding for Mifflin Summer Zone comes from the Russell L. Hiller Charitable Trust of Berks County Community Foundation. The Russell L. Hiller Charitable Trust Fund provides grants for programs that improve the quality of life for residents of the Governor Mifflin School District. It was established by a bequest by the late Judge Russell L. Hiller, who lived in the Shillington area.

Mifflin Summer Zone runs in June and July each year. The program’s impact extends far and wide. This year, there

were fourteen zones for students ranging from 1st to 12th grade, and it was free for all students. The program filled 609 student slots at a cost of approximately \$43 per student/slot.

The Summer Zone offers a diverse range of exciting options. From music technology to cooking, art to sports, students can explore subjects they might not encounter during the regular school year. Travis Williamson, a music teacher leading the “Launching Creativity in the Music Tech Room” zone, shares his enthusiasm, “Part of the total experience learning are the top skills that employers want the kids to have for 2025. We’ve been asking the kids... What do you think? And the kids might say, ‘Oh, creativity, originality, taking initiative.’”

The Launching Creativity in the Music Tech Room received funding through a Teacher Mini-Grant to provide students with access to Novation Launchpad Mini Controllers. These MIDI-Pads are for use with Sequencing Software (GarageBand). The Teacher Mini-Grant Program provides grants of up to \$500 for Berks County K-12 school employees to support a classroom activity or project. The MIDI-Pads enabled students to use these devices for their loop-based compositions, recording-focused compositions, and film scoring projects. The touch pads allowed students to record software instrument sounds by touching sequences, arpeggiating, and finger drumming.

Students like Bentley, who took part in multiple music-related zones, including Launching Creativity in the Music Tech Room, exemplify the program’s success. “I’m a part of every music summer zone. I just love music and everything about music,” Bentley explains. His experience creating a metal song during the program showcases the hands-on, creative learning opportunities Summer Zone provides.

The program’s impact extends beyond just academic skills. Stephanie Carter, another educator involved in the Summer Zone, emphasizes the importance of creating a safe learning environment where students can express their thoughts and opinions freely. “Champion equity and thought and practice. The biggest thing for this camp especially is that every kid has access to the same materials,” she notes. Funding from the Teacher Mini-Grant supported the purchase of 5 MIDI Pad-based controllers, increasing the inventory of devices that would allow students more opportunity to use this technology in the Summer Zone.

Summer camps like the Mifflin Summer Zone play a crucial role in student development. They provide a unique blend of academic reinforcement and creative exploration that keeps young minds engaged during the summer months.

The success of Mifflin Summer Zone inspires us with an example of what a community can achieve when it comes together to support its students.



Support from two funds created by donors who support our mission is the reason that the Foundation can fund these programs. This provides students with the ability to continue their learning during the summer months at little to no cost. As we continue to invest in programs like these, we're not just preventing the summer slide - we're investing in our students toward a brighter, more creative future.

Students focus on editing music tracks and listening intently with headphones at the Mifflin Summer Zone.



Kim Sheffer, Lifelong Learning Program Officer, listens to students creating their own musical compositions.







# Fiscal Year 2024 in Review

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District Court 23-1-02

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Lifelong Learning  
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Emily A. Smedley  
Environment and Energy  
Program Officer

Staff as of July 1, 2024.

\* Officers and Directors as of July 1, 2024.

\*\* Serves as an officer, not a board member.



## Financial Position

Berks County Community Foundation, Inc. and Supporting Organizations  
Combined Statements of Activities | Years Ended June 30, 2024 and 2023

### Investment Policy

The investment policy of Berks County Community Foundation is similar to that of most community foundations. The foundation has a diversified and balanced portfolio. The objective of the investment policy is to provide a return that will preserve and grow the Community Foundation's assets, while providing a consistent stream of revenue to issue grants and scholarships. Annual distributions by the Community Foundation are generally calculated at 4.5 percent of the fair market value of each grant and scholarship fund. When annual earnings exceed a year's distribution from a fund, the excess is retained in endowment principal.

This strategy is intended to grow fund assets, thereby ensuring that the funds will fulfill their purpose in perpetuity.

For a copy of the Community Foundation's investment policy, audited financial statements, and our tax return, please visit [www.bccf.org](http://www.bccf.org) or call 610-685-2223.

Assets	2024	2023
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 4,401,648	\$ 4,183,198
Prepaid Expenses	43,674	64,309
Contributions receivable, net	35,520	20,730
Beneficial interest in trusts	1,018,495	946,518
Property and equipment, net	93,254	67,116
Building, net	4,057,126	4,220,688
Land	243,754	243,754
Loans and interest receivable, net	268,501	278,954
Investments, at fair value	125,139,161	113,953,383
Total assets	\$ 135,301,133	\$ 123,978,650

Liabilities and Net Assets		
Accounts payable	\$ 77,104	\$ 111,682
Grants payable, net	1,507,737	1,493,698
Accrued expenses	117,356	110,817
Notes payable	1,576,468	1,641,927
Annuity payment liabilities	29,666	31,585
Funds held as agency endowments	4,690,338	3,986,752
Total liabilities	7,998,669	7,376,461
Net assets without donor restriction	126,283,969	115,655,671
Net assets with donor restriction	1,018,495	946,518
Total net assets	127,302,464	116,602,189
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 135,301,133	\$ 123,978,650

Revenue and Other Support		
Contributions	\$ 4,606,840	\$ 4,844,852
Investment income	2,131,042	1,925,764
Net realized gains on investments	6,880,286	3,885,346
Net unrealized gain on investments	5,090,116	1,381,661
Net unrealized gain from beneficial interest in trusts	71,977	19,037
Other income	253,134	144,959
Total revenue and other support	19,033,395	12,201,619

Expenses		
Program services	6,975,751	7,352,540
General and administrative	810,024	919,312
Fundraising	547,345	606,155
Total expenses	8,333,120	8,878,007
Increase in net assets	10,700,275	3,323,612
Net assets at beginning of year	116,602,189	113,278,577
Net assets at end of year	\$ 127,302,464	\$ 116,602,189



## About Berks County Community Foundation

Berks County Community Foundation is a nonprofit corporation that serves as a civic leader for our region by developing, managing, and distributing charitable funds aimed at improving the quality of life in Berks County, Pennsylvania.



BERKS COUNTY  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

The official registration and financial information of Berks County Community Foundation may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1.800.732.0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

### Contact Us Or Visit Us Online

237 Court Street  
Reading, PA 19601

610-685-2223  
[www.bccf.org](http://www.bccf.org)

