

PASSION & PURPOSE

THE CFO NEWSLETTER
FALL 2025



MORE INSIDE

GRANT-FUNDED NONPROFITS ADDRESS
AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS — PLUS ONE
AFFILIATE'S HOMEGROWN APPROACH
MEET COMMUNITY LEADERS

A New Home for Generosity

The CFO takes up residence at 300 South Jefferson



A MESSAGE FROM WINTER

The poet T.S. Eliot is credited with the quote: “Home is where one starts from.” I like that thought. Each morning, my day begins with the same room, same staircase, same teapot. Home is also my emotional base. I’m incredibly fortunate to know that no matter what happens in the course of a day, I have a place to return to that provides me with the same starting point tomorrow.

We own our house, but that’s not what makes it home. That comes from the shared experiences and sense of belonging the people (and animals) within it create every day. And with that mindset, can’t home be any place that provides a sense of comfort, community or identity? I think so.

The Community Foundation of the Ozarks created such a place in early August, when we moved our headquarters to the fourth floor at 300 South Jefferson in downtown Springfield. And while we had been planning and building the space for a year and a half, it wasn’t home until nearly 30 CFO team members started working, talking and laughing here. And indeed, in our mission to enhance the quality of life in our region, everything now starts here. On page 3, you’ll find photos of the work that went into creating our new offices, which we will spend much of the fall celebrating with our community.

The rest of this edition expands on the idea of home across the region, highlighting just some of the ways generous and hard-working folks are providing such spaces for others. On pages 4 and 5 you’ll read about the Drew Lewis Foundation’s Blue House Project, which provides accessible housing for Springfield residents, and Joplin Area Habitat for Humanity’s HOPE program, which helps homeowners make their spaces safer and more livable with low-cost repair projects. Both are recent recipients of housing-focused grants.

On page 6, we shift our focus to hometowns with a look at the long-standing work of



the Willow Springs Community Foundation to invest in affordable housing projects and redevelop community buildings. These efforts not only add to the community’s housing stock but also boost the local economy and make Willow Springs a more comfortable, enjoyable place to live.

Finally, just before deadline, we were thrilled to announce the CFO as a 2025 recipient of a \$250,000 Civic Hub Grant from the Trust for Civic Life. Over the next three years, the CFO will engage with — and connect — rural communities like never before. We’ll work with our affiliate foundations to re-grant a portion of these funds, create civic engagement playbooks and provide convening opportunities for communities across the region — all in the name of making our collective Ozarks home a better place to live.

I’ll close with another quote from another famed author, one who knew exactly what it felt like to start a day in the Ozarks.

“Home is the nicest word there is,” said Laura Ingalls Wilder. After reading this newsletter, I think you’ll agree.

Winter Kinne is president and CEO of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks.

CFO UPDATES

AFFILIATE LEADERSHIP UPDATES

Douglas County

Community Foundation

Interim president: Diana Middleton

Incoming: Ann Leonard



Nixa Community Foundation

Outgoing: Jimmy Liles

Incoming: Freddie Young



Owensville Area Community Foundation

Outgoing: Shannon Grus

Incoming: Kyle Larimore

UPCOMING EVENTS

Virtual Table Topics for Affiliates

- Noon–1 p.m., Oct. 16
- Virtual event
- Discussion topic: “How to Celebrate Success”
- For more info: Contact Joe Kammerer at jkammerer@cfozarks.org

Community Open House at 300 South Jefferson

- 3–5 p.m., Nov. 12
- Hospitality Room at 300 South Jefferson, Springfield
- Free, come-and-go event
- For more info: Contact Matt Lemmon at mlemmon@cfozarks.org

Legacy Society Reception at “Generations: Celebrating the Legacy” with The Ozark Mountain Daredevils

- 5:30 p.m., Nov. 14
- Juanita K. Hammons Hall, Springfield
- Exclusive for Legacy Society members
- All tickets reserved; For more info or to be added to the waitlist: Contact Anna Dowell at adowell@cfozarks.org

National Philanthropy Day & Humanitarian Award Presentation

- 11 a.m.–1 p.m., Nov. 18
- Glendalough Convention Center at DoubleTree Hotel, Springfield
- Tickets available at cfozarks.org/npd



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION of the OZARKS

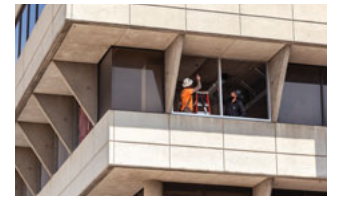
Passion & Purpose is a quarterly publication of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, a public charitable foundation representing the region of Missouri south of the Missouri River. For more information, call 417-864-6199, email cfo@cfozarks.org or visit cfozarks.org.

Production: Aaron Scott, Kaitlyn McConnell, Matthew Stewart and Matt Lemmon

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF THE OZARKS



- ◀ By late January, crews had the interior ready for infill.
- ▼ In March and April, glaziers installed new windows across the entire fourth floor.



Making Space for Philanthropy

PHOTO GALLERY BY AARON SCOTT

- ▲ In early January, demolition began on the fourth floor of 300 South Jefferson in downtown Springfield. The work kicked off a seven-month-long renovation for the CFO's new headquarters, designed by Dake Wells Architecture and led by general contractor J.E. Dunn, which delivered the project on time and under budget.



- ◀ In May and June, St. James-based Cohen Woodworking installed wood throughout the project to add warmth and soften the Brutalist design.
- ▼ In June, CFO staff — led by Luis Leon, who served as project manager in addition to his role as CFO and executive vice president — toured the project in its final stages.



- ◀ Beginning in July, MTS Contracting crews powerwashed, patched and sealed the exterior of 300 South Jefferson, bringing new life to the five-decade-old concrete.
- ▼ The CFO kicked off celebrations of its new headquarters on Sept. 3 with a special tour for past and current board members, featuring remarks by current vice chair Jimmy Liles (center).



SEE IT FOR YOURSELF: The CFO will host a community open house on Nov. 12 — find details on the opposite page. Can't make it? Find more photos online at cfozarks.org/300sjefferson.



Building Back a Neighborhood

WITH SUPPORT FROM GRANTMAKERS,
DREW LEWIS FOUNDATION'S BLUE HOUSE PROJECT
REVITALIZES GRANT BEACH IN SPRINGFIELD

The house at 1036 W. Calhoun isn't blue and probably won't end up blue, but it's a standard-issue development for the Blue House Project, the Drew Lewis Foundation's community revitalization program in Springfield's Grant Beach neighborhood. On a late-summer day, DLF's Mike Stevens and Luke Job show off the modest two-story home in its final stages of renovation.

"One of my favorite things is walking through houses with [site supervisor] Chris Wilson or Amy [Blansit, DLF's CEO]," says Stevens, the Blue House Project coordinator. "They'll say, 'We can open this up, move the ceilings, change the kitchen.' Amy has incredible spatial vision — she can modernize a space while keeping the historic character. But really, we think these old homes are beautiful and worth saving."

Saving homes that private developers overlook is only part of the story. "It's getting people into homes, it's renovating worthy homes, it's building a sense of neighborhood and community in Grant Beach," Stevens said of the project's overall goals.

ROOTED IN 'RISE'

The project's roots stretch back to the Northwest Project, a five-year effort launched in 2016 to address poverty in Springfield's Council Zone 1. Amy Blansit recalls: "It started out with Chris Craig and I going to places like OACAC

and learning about their services. He and I are both [Missouri State University] professors, so we really wanted to focus on data and research as a foundation to the project."

NWP — which would evolve into RISE, short for "Reaching Independence through Support and Education" — was a collaborative effort on several levels. Partners included MSU, Drury University, Multipli Credit Union and other financial institutions, and dozens of community agencies and businesses. The project was initially funded by the Jeannette L. Musgrave Foundation, the Stanley and Elaine Ball Foundation, and a \$500,000 grant from the CFO, the largest single grant in the organization's history.

The core of the RISE program is a 17-week holistic life-skills course built on the understanding that lifting people out of the cycle of poverty requires long-term and intentional support. Blansit ended up writing the curriculum herself and assigning research to MSU graduate students, which allowed for turn-on-a-dime flexibility. "We listened to families, surveyed constantly and built new courses based on their needs," she says.

A surprise need that arose along the way — and a lack Blansit saw in other poverty-reduction programs — was a focus on banking. "We were looking at, 'why are these



PHOTOS BY AARON SCOTT

families not in banking?" she says. To rebuild credit score and banking relationships, RISE's curriculum offers a special focus on long-term financial wisdom. DLF also created a fund at Multipli Credit Union that families in RISE could borrow against. "We took on the risk, but it's been since 2016, 2017 and the fund's still there and families are still borrowing against it."

BLUE HOUSE'S BUILDING BLOCKS

This focus on the long-term, on the complete picture, laid the groundwork for the Blue House Project. In their careful collection of data, DLF staff saw that housing conditions weren't improving among RISE graduates. Lower-income families were hit hard by rising rents, slumlord conditions and lack of quality housing.

At the time, Blansit learned that only about 40% of the homes in Grant Beach — home of The Fairbanks, where DLF is based, and where Blansit herself resides — were owner-occupied; the rest were rentals. "We know how that affects the school and the mobility of kids in



"It's getting people into homes, it's renovating worthy homes, *it's building a sense of neighborhood and community* in Grant Beach."

MIKE STEVENS
DREW LEWIS FOUNDATION



Luke Job, carpenter for Drew Lewis Foundation's Blue House Project, nails trim around the back door of a house in Springfield's Grant Beach neighborhood. The house, pictured below, will be sold below market value to a family in DLF's RISE program to help the family build financial equity.

and out of the school," she says. "We know how it affects crime rates."

The Blue House Project began when Blansit noticed a vacant house across from The Fairbanks. The owners, a family that had put a lot of care into the home, didn't want it to become a rental. Partnering with a funder, the foundation bought and renovated it. The house was blue; the project had a name.

Since then, DLF has renovated more than 30 homes, nearly all in Grant Beach. About two-thirds are sold below market value to low-income families, often RISE graduates, with down-payment assistance from the City of Springfield and Restore SGF. "If it's one of our families, we typically do \$10,000 below market value," Blansit says. The other third are sold at market rate to create mixed-income neighborhoods.

The success of the Blue House Project has earned the backing of grantmakers. In fall of 2024, the project received \$36,145 in the inaugural grant round of the Generosity Collective, a high-impact giving circle supported by the CFO. And last summer, the Musgrave Foundation selected the Blue House Project for a "Keys to Housing" Multi-Year Impact Grant totaling \$300,000 over three years to expand its impact in Grant Beach. A big goal, Blansit says, is to "get the balance of homeownership and rentals to about 50-50" in the neighborhood.

While the foundation hopes to see the project expand in other parts of Springfield, the focus on neighborhoods will remain key. Stevens sees the project as "community through proximity. You're close enough that you interact with each other — and that makes us better as a community and as a neighborhood."

—by Matthew Stewart

Improving Homes with HOPE in Joplin

\$50,000 'PHIL' GRANT TO JOPLIN AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY SUPPORTS LOW-COST REPAIRS FOR HOMEOWNERS

Joplin Area Habitat for Humanity builds brighter futures in Missouri's southwest corner. Now, that work is increasing through the Home Owner Property Enhancement program, a new initiative that helps low-income homeowners — primarily seniors, veterans and individuals with physical disabilities — with repair projects at a discount.

"There's this middle ground that's happening now — it's people who have had a good job and lived a good life, but now that they're retired — or whatever situation that they're in — and they can't afford the heavy cost of all that's needed now," says Scott Clayton, Joplin Area Habitat's executive director, on the need for the HOPE program.

"In a world where everything is just so expensive, if you're on a fixed income and you have one or two things go wrong, then you don't know what you're going to do."

Help for those answers was recently supported by \$50,000 from the Joplin Regional Community Foundation's Philanthropic Society. The grant was one of four allocations directed to area nonprofits in May by the group, whose members donate \$2,000 to \$2,500 in annual dues and vote on which causes to support with the collective funding.

"It's dollars that go directly into changing our neighbors' lives in a way that had not been addressed previously," says Tom Wells with the Phil, who notes it's meaningful to see the dollars making a quick impact. "Let's get projects done and make their lives better."

An example is Jonna, who with her husband represents some of the HOPE program's first beneficiaries. The couple has lived in their Carthage home for more than 35 years, but retirement income and health challenges have made maintenance a challenge.

"I don't like it that the house is needing



PHOTO BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

Bryan West, Joplin Area Habitat for Humanity's community development manager, and Scott Clayton, its executive director, recently helped implement the Home Owner Property Enhancement program. The new initiative helps eligible homeowners make repairs that they are not able to do themselves.

repairs," Jonna says, noting she has tried to find contractors to address the issues but couldn't find options in her price range.

The new HOPE program and additional volunteer support will replace some windows, fix siding and soffits, and help rebuild their back patio.

"God has provided so much," she says. "He's taken care of us."

The HOPE program is one of several initiatives administered by the Joplin Area Habitat chapter. Some are supported by volunteers and others involve contractors to complete bigger tasks.

"There's enough good nonprofits and people that want to make things happen for folks," says Clayton of local resources. "If that conversation can happen and we can get to know a situation, perhaps we can find out the best way to make a good connection."

—by Kaitlyn McConnell



'Building Blocks' in Howell County

WILLOW SPRINGS
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION'S
HOMEGROWN APPROACH TO
AFFORDABLE HOUSING

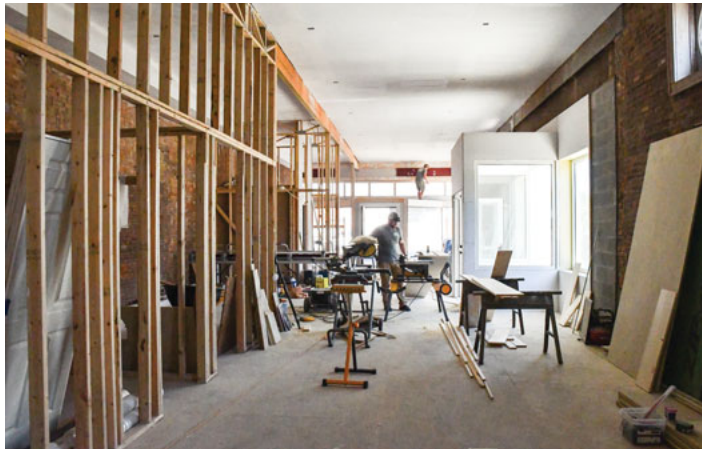
So much is possible with a strong foundation. It's true in literal and figurative ways through housing in Howell County, where the Willow Springs Community Foundation has invested decades in improving living spaces for people, businesses and community.

That includes houses and apartments but also commercial buildings — like the historic McClellan building, the foundation's most recent project, that adds mixed-use space to the downtown district.

"I look for ways for the foundation to have an impact on jobs, on housing, on education, on entertainment, activities — because those are the building blocks of a community," says Dean Aye, director of the WSCF. "I want to be able to do things that typically businesses cannot do just because of the nature of who we are and how we're structured."

The WSCF joined the CFO's affiliate network in 2001 and continues operating a separate organization to buy, redevelop and manage property in Willow Springs. The nonprofit's work began when Wendell Bailey, a local champion and WSCF supporter, was Missouri's state treasurer. Through another role he held with the Missouri Housing Development Corporation, he helped lead the creation of a government program that allowed communities to apply for grant funding to build low-income housing.

That led to a collection of homes — mostly three-bedroom, two-bathroom ranch-style



PHOTOS BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

Dean Aye, top left, directs the Willow Springs Community Foundation's work to develop and manage affordable housing units. Crews are renovating the historic McClellan building with apartments already available on the second floor.

houses — throughout town, some of which are long-term rentals and others that are eventually sold.

"If you get a job, and you start to move up in the world, and you further your education, and then you start to earn more money, then eventually they price themselves out of the house," Aye says. "To me, that's a success story, because I think that's what I want for my community."

Over the last three decades, the foundation has amassed a substantial portfolio: more than 20 homes; a 20-unit apartment complex in nearby West Plains; a home that houses the local historical society; grassy lots where uninhabitable houses were demolished, leaving room for future development; the historic Star Theater (where monthly music shows draw the community together); and two towering downtown buildings.

WSCF's most recent project was restoring the aforementioned McClellan building, a downtown anchor that had fallen into disrepair. The structure was ultimately donated to the foundation which decided to champion its restoration.

"Nothing would have ever been put there, so you just would've had a hole in your downtown 125 feet long — half a city block," Aye says. "The best option is to put it back into use as community housing on the upper floors and try to get retail in on the bottom floor."

When complete, the building will offer

commercial space on the main level and several apartments — ranging from efficiency to two-bedroom — above. At least one of those is already leased.

It's a multi-layered win for Willow Springs: A win for civic pride for beautification, a win for the people who will live there, a win for the business that will eventually call it home, and a win for the money it's infused into community.

"All of that money is just churning around in our economy locally," Aye said, who also noted that all the work following the building's stabilization was done with local contractors and materials.

And ultimately, keeping families local helps the community thrive, too.

"Low-income housing resources, such as affordable housing programs and public housing, play a crucial role in supporting the community," says Jamie Riddle, who has worked for the WSCF for a year and manages its West Plains apartment complex.

She knows this through facts, but also firsthand. Riddle also lives with her children in one of the foundation's homes, a place they've been for nearly five years.

"I am proud to say with the job opportunity of working for the foundation, and living in a house I can afford, I am finally ahead," said Riddle. "I will be looking for a place to buy in the near future."

—by Kaitlyn McConnell

PASSION *for* PROGRESS

Three leaders moving the needle in their communities through the power of philanthropy

STORIES & PHOTOS BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

Lori Jones

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · RONALD McDONALD
HOUSE OF THE FOUR STATES, JOPLIN

Long before Lori Jones became executive director of Ronald McDonald House of the Four States, she committed herself to Joplin. Her connection goes back to when she chose Joplin as her home after college.



"I really picked Joplin, not for a job, but because that was a town that I wanted to live in," says Jones, who was born in Joplin but grew up in southeast Kansas. "It felt like coming home."

That decision — anchored by marriage and family — forms the foundation of a career spanning trucking, retail and management. Those experiences led her to the Ronald McDonald House, which serves families whose children are receiving care at local hospitals. These chapters taught Jones that success comes through good leadership, transparency and efficiency.

"I try to be really open with communication and transparent," Jones says, noting that she shares as much as possible with employees. "If I know and they can know, then they should."

Jones serves her neighbors beyond the office. Examples include the Joplin Regional Community Foundation, where she is on the board, and Nonprofit Leadership Connect, a group of local leaders she organized that meets to stay informed about needs and opportunities.

The group emerged after seeing the effectiveness of change when figurative "silos" are gone, such as in the wake of crises like the 2011 Joplin tornado and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We come together and we talk about what's going good and what our challenges are," Jones says of the group. "We collaborate and talk about shared opportunities."

"But more than anything, we have become friends. If I have a family staying here and they need clothing, I have a cell phone number, I can text a director, and we work together."

Andy Drennen

SENIOR PORTFOLIO MANAGER · SIMMONS PRIVATE
WEALTH; MEMBER · CFO INVESTMENT ADVISORY BOARD

Andy Drennen knows some help can make a difference — and he's using that knowledge to help others.

A senior portfolio manager for Simmons Private Wealth and member of the CFO's Investment Advisory Board, Drennen is the child of missionaries. Growing up in South America showed him the tragedy of extreme need, and, later, he realized his family received support for things like Christmas toys.

"I saw poverty at its worst," he says of his time in Paraguay. "Kids living on the street; selling whatever they could to get by. I guess those two things, once I got older and in a career, was like, 'If I can find a way to give back with my personal resources, I'm definitely going to do that.'"

That desire has manifested through Stand For Springfield, a donor-advised fund which Drennen and a co-founder began to support the community.

"I didn't get to meet the person that gave me the toy 30-whatever years ago," he says. "I'm not going to see the results that this will have 30 years from now, and I'm 100% okay with that."

The fund primarily supports Springfield youth. In addition to holiday and back-to-school needs, an example of the fund's impact is seen through grants for the FosterAdopt Connect's YouthConnect Center, a drop-in shelter for teenagers who are experiencing housing instability. The fund helped provide a pair of shoes a youth needed for a performance, Drennen says.

The experience has fulfilled Drennen's desire to serve but also shows him how generous community members can be, too.

"I think most remarkable for me is that there are so many people in our community that care. If they just have a conduit, somebody to rally them, then they will step up."



Dr. Debra Royce

MAYOR · SARCOXIE; BOARD MEMBER ·
SARCOXIE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Dr. Debra Royce has long helped heal hurt — and improve health — in Sarcoxie. That's literally true through her work as a physician, but after moving home in the late '90s to take over her father's medical practice, she has also championed local causes.



"It was always kind of my dream to come back to town and be the doctor," Royce says, who retired in 2021. "For 59 years, there were a lot of people who hadn't been to a doctor not named Royce. I actually practiced a year longer than I wanted to, but I couldn't find anybody to buy (the practice), and I didn't want to just close it up, because they needed a physician here."

Dr. Royce's role in local leadership began on the local school board years ago. That work led to her leadership in raising \$500,000 for a new athletic stadium, now named in her honor, over the course of six years.

"I went to every ball game. We carried up the chili and the taco meat. We did a ham-and-bean feed. It was just one thing after another," she says of just a few of the ways the group worked to raise money. "Just building that stadium renewed the kids ... about staying around here."

Another effort, she notes, is the Come Back Kids Scholarship. The endowment currently holds about \$125,000 to help local students complete their college education if they commit to returning to Sarcoxie to teach for two years.

She has served with the Sarcoxie Community Foundation, which has supported needs from the town's outreach center to its veterans memorial. And in 2023, Royce was elected mayor — a position that has helped her support the city pool (a pet project), fix the town's streets and plan for future water needs.

"I love this town," she says. "It's been really good to me, and so I've tried to give back to as best I could."

WHO INSPIRES YOU? Send your suggestions of individuals moving the needle in your community to Kaitlyn McConnell, the CFO's writer in residence, at kmccconnell@cfozarks.org.



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PHOTO BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

PARTING SHOT: A new mural in Aurora reminds that “All Roads Lead Home.”

The colorful work — the fifth tied to Aurora’s Youth Empowerment Project chapter — is more than visual art: It’s a tie to history, a connection with place and reminds that the past isn’t far behind.

“We talk about the history, we talk about climate and culture, and we talk about the challenges that the leaders face,” says Kim McCully-Mobley, an Aurora teacher, YEP chapter sponsor and coordinator of the of the Aurora Area Community Foundation. “But a lot of the same challenges that our initial leaders faced are the same ones that we face today.”

The mural focuses on the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026. It also carries symbolism, tied locally to the 2nd Missouri Infantry.

The mural came to life at the hands of Raine Clotfelter. Known as “America’s Muralist,” Clotfelter’s work dots communities across the Ozarks — including through the Freedom Silo, a landmark in Monett.

“If you can be involved any how, any way in benchmarking history, you cannot get a better opportunity in life,” Clotfelter says. “It’s honoring to be able to do that. A mural doesn’t seem like a very big thing, but once it’s painted it becomes history.”

Like previous murals and other projects, the Aurora YEP chapter provided ideation and financial support for the mural to remind locals of their roots and community. The new mural now hangs on the north wall of the Aurora school district’s central offices, part of a reminder of what can be built here and now.

“We just want to educate kids and let them have healthy communication and dialogue,” McCully-Mobley says of challenges and opportunities communities face. “And then figure out how to solve problems, be kind to one another and make things happen.”

—by Kaitlyn McConnell