

PASSION & PURPOSE

THE CFO NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2026



MORE INSIDE

INSIDE CFO'S MISSION-RELATED
INVESTMENT PROGRAM

MEET NEW COMMUNITY LEADERS

Driving Philanthropy on the Mother Road

As Route 66 turns 100, charitable projects like Boots Court Foundation add vibrancy to communities



A MESSAGE FROM WINTER

The Community Foundation of the Ozarks is an organization rooted in place. This means we are committed to embracing and enhancing the assets — natural, human and civic — that make the communities we serve unique. Thankfully, southern Missouri has a great many unique features, which makes this mission not only attainable, but fun.

One of the most visible such features is Route 66, the famed U.S. highway that once ran uninterrupted from Chicago to Santa Monica. For years the highway served as not only a major national transportation artery but developed a mythology all its own thanks to the rise of the automobile, westward migration and pop culture staples like the song “(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66,” John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath” — and, for my fellow Lightning McQueen moms out there — Pixar’s “Cars.”

Route 66 is perhaps even more relevant right here at home. The name for the highway was requested from Springfield in 1926, just a block north of today’s downtown CFO headquarters, an occasion that will be honored (with NBC’s “Today” show!) April 30–May 2 when Springfield hosts the national Route 66 centennial celebration. If Route 66 is America’s main artery, Springfield must be its heart.

But as a Mount Vernon girl whose first two childhood homes were located on old Route 66, which skirts just north of my hometown, I’d argue Route 66’s lasting charm exists in the smaller places along the way. The highway — and its four-lane successor, Interstate 44 — is a connector of many small- to mid-sized cities that flourished in the last century thanks to transportation. Many of these communities are home to CFO affiliate foundations, and our staff knows them well.

All of our communities are unique, but it’s safe to say there’s just something that hits differently when you drive by the Boots Court in Carthage at twilight or take a stroll beneath



the beautiful Route 66 murals in Cuba. We are proud to say that the CFO’s affiliates had a hand in helping preserve both of these landmarks and more, which you can read about beginning on page 3 of this newsletter. Also in this issue:

- I have attended a number of out-of-town meetings and conferences over the past year, and one of the hottest topics nationally is “impact investing,” which the CFO has long called mission-related investing. For more than 15 years, we provided alternative funding for worthy nonprofit and civic projects, supplementing the work already conducted by local banks and other institutions. You can read more about our Mission-Related Investment program on page 6.
- In what is quickly becoming one of my favorite quarterly features, on page 7 we highlight three fresh faces from across the Ozarks who are making their communities better.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter as much as I did. And no matter how you choose to get your kicks, on behalf of the CFO, I hope you have a safe and happy spring.

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

CFO UPDATES

NEW LEGACY SOCIETY MEMBERS

- Violet and John Branham, Neosho Area Community Foundation

The Legacy Society recognizes donors who make a planned gift to a fund held by the CFO or its affiliate foundations. For more info, visit cfozarks.org/legacy.

AFFILIATE LEADERSHIP UPDATES



Barton County Community Foundation

Outgoing: Shelly Haag
Incoming: Heidi Johnson



Perry County Community Foundation

Outgoing: Natalie Lorenz
Incoming: Terina Dillahay



Community Foundation of Rogersville

Outgoing: Brian VanFosson
Incoming: Christina Craig

NEW PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS

- Elizabeth Allen — Nevada
- Justin Cantwell — Carnahan Evans PC, Springfield

Through the Professional Advisors Council, the CFO partners with legal and financial experts to meet their clients’ philanthropic needs. For more info, visit cfozarks.org/pac.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Rural Philanthropy Summit

- April 23–24 at Missouri S&T in Rolla
- Co-presented with Philanthropy Missouri
- For more info: cfozarks.org/summit26

Federal Policy and the Future of Community Foundations

- 8:15 a.m., April 30, at Hickory Hills Country Club, Springfield
- Free for Professional Advisors Council members
- Continuing education credits available
- For more info: cfozarks.org/pac-ed

Making AI Work for All Teams

- 9 a.m., June 5, at Darr Agricultural Center, Springfield
- Co-presented with Greater Ozarks Cooperating School Districts and Missouri State’s Center for Rural Education
- Free for the CFO’s rural school partners
- For more info: cfozarks.org/ai-educators



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

FUELED BY PHILANTHROPY

A Route 66 Road Trip

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE BIRTH OF ROUTE 66, THE CFO'S AFFILIATE FOUNDATIONS AND NONPROFIT PARTNERS IMPROVE LIFE ALONG THE MOTHER ROAD

Route 66 links lives and lifetimes. The famed Mother Road was born in the Ozarks on April 30, 1926. That day, at about 4 p.m., a telegram was sent from downtown Springfield to Washington, D.C., requesting what would become the iconic name for a stretch of highway from Chicago to Los Angeles.

That moment started a century-long (and counting) journey, one that has manifested in both literal miles on the road and figurative trips through pop culture. Just one example is “(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66,” a hit written by Bobby Troup and recorded by the King Cole Trio in the 1940s. It was a song, but it was part of a movement: The road meant something to people, whether it was the representation of a dream or the path to a better life.

At the end of the day, those realities are made possible by people. One was John T. Woodruff, a Springfield businessman, community supporter and “Good Roads” champion who served as the first president of the U.S. Highway 66 Association in the 1920s.

His early work joins that of countless others who have intersected with this road, whether it was by running a motor court or a cafe, or helping improve the town where they lived.

In the following pages, you’ll discover projects meant to enhance life along Route 66’s path across the CFO’s footprint. Some efforts focus on improving quality of life for people who live in those places. In other cases, the work is designed to introduce communities to the world.

Even though a century has passed, the work isn’t done. And like in days gone by, it’s people who keep the communities along the road moving forward. Individual actions together create lasting change — both for visitors, but also those who call a place home.

—by Kaitlyn McConnell

CARTHAGE

Boots Court

The Boots Court, a vintage Route 66 motel in Carthage, is on a journey of renewal.

Opened in 1939, it drew travelers — including, some say, Clark Gable — for decades until it fell into decline. Two sisters purchased the motor court to save it, beginning a restoration process that took it back into the minds of Route 66 travelers. When they decided to retire in 2021, the Boots Court Foundation stepped in to continue that work.

“Boots Court is an outstanding example of early motor court lodging and one of the few original motels still operating along historic Route 66,” says Betsy Flanigan, president of the Boots board. “Its preservation safeguards an important piece of Carthage’s history while strengthening the city’s connection to Route 66.”

Restoration efforts include extensive interior and exterior repairs to the original motel building. Period furnishings enhance the rooms. Next door, a vintage gas station has been transformed into a visitors center.

“Nearly every inch of the structure was inspected, repaired or replaced, with great care taken to preserve the building’s historic integrity,” Flanigan says, expressing gratitude for the Carthage Community Foundation’s support of those restoration efforts. “Today, guests are invited to unplug, unwind and experience the nostalgia of an earlier era.”



PHOTOS BY AARON SCOTT



PHOTO BY KAITLYN McCONNELL

JOPLIN

Harry M. Cornell Arts & Entertainment Complex

The Harry M. Cornell Arts & Entertainment Complex is a hub for artistic activities, local creativity and community building in Joplin and beyond.

Two nonprofits are leading these missions: Connect2Culture and the Spiva Center for the Arts, complementary organizations that moved into the Cornell Complex upon its completion in November 2022. More than \$19 million was raised through the facility's capital campaign, which was administered through multiple funds held with the CFO and the Joplin Regional Community Foundation.

Among other activities, the center's auditorium is home for performing

arts, and Spiva's gallery showcases an evolving slate of exhibitions — including the nationally recognized Photo-Spiva, a juried photography show that began in 1977. The complex also hosts classes and workshops for all ages.

“The building provides an intentional space for the arts, and the work of C2C and Spiva is what makes it vibrant, active and full of energy,” says Emily Frankoski, executive director of C2C. “The biggest strength of the complex is that it brings different art forms together in one place — visual arts through Spiva and performing arts through Connect2Culture. That combination allows the building to serve a wide range of artists and audiences.”



PHOTO BY KAITLYN McCONNELL

MARSHFIELD

Hidden Waters Nature Park

Whether they're traveling from down the street or across the globe, Hidden Waters Nature Park takes visitors on a journey into Ozarks history and natural beauty.

The park along Route 66 in Marshfield is the realized dream of Dan and Zoe Beckner, who founded it in 2003. Over the past 23 years, Hidden Waters — which holds a fund with the Marshfield Area Community Foundation — has expanded multiple times in acreage and amenities.

“Many travelers locate our park and use it as an opportunity to bring lunch, stretch their legs, let the kids romp and walk their dogs,” says Chris Davis, president of the Hidden Waters board of directors.

The historic Callaway Cabin, built in the 1850s, was moved to the park and reopened in 2010. Trails and interpretative displays share history. In 2023, the park opened a welcome center for classes and educational events. But the work isn't done. Future improvements include a metal bridge, constructed in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright, and a 'green' parking lot with a lodge-type pavilion that will connect sidewalks and landscaping.

Hidden Waters isn't the only Route 66 stop in Marshfield. A new Route 66 park, featuring a vintage service station, is under construction about a mile away.



DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD

Route 66 Festivals, Public Art & More

Springfield is celebrating Route 66's centennial in style. The Mother Road's birthplace — and home to the CFO headquarters, which is located within sight of where the thoroughfare was “born” in 1926 — is officially starting the festivities through the National Route 66 Kickoff Celebration.

From April 30 to May 2, the event marks the moment through music (including a concert headlined by Little Big Town), a classic car show and parade, landmark

dedications and more. Those festivities are supported by the City of Springfield and Visit Springfield through a fund with the CFO. The CFO has also supported efforts to add public art along the historic road like Sculpture Walk Springfield and the Overlay mural festival.

The fun continues in August when the city's long-running Birthplace of Route 66 Festival returns. And that's not to mention the many local landmarks that connect the road's past to its future in Springfield.



PHOTO BY AARON SCOTT

CUBA

Route 66 Mural City

Cuba's history lives on through 15 murals that tell the Crawford County town's colorful story. That effort is part of a larger, decades-long mission led by Viva Cuba, a nonprofit partner of the Crawford County Foundation Inc. and the CFO, to help attract visitors and jobs to town.

Among other topics, the town's murals preserve memories of local business and industry, the role of rivers in local life, and actress Bette Davis's 1948 visit. The story expands beyond Cuba to a website — "tour" the murals and read the backstories of their significance at cubamomurals.com.

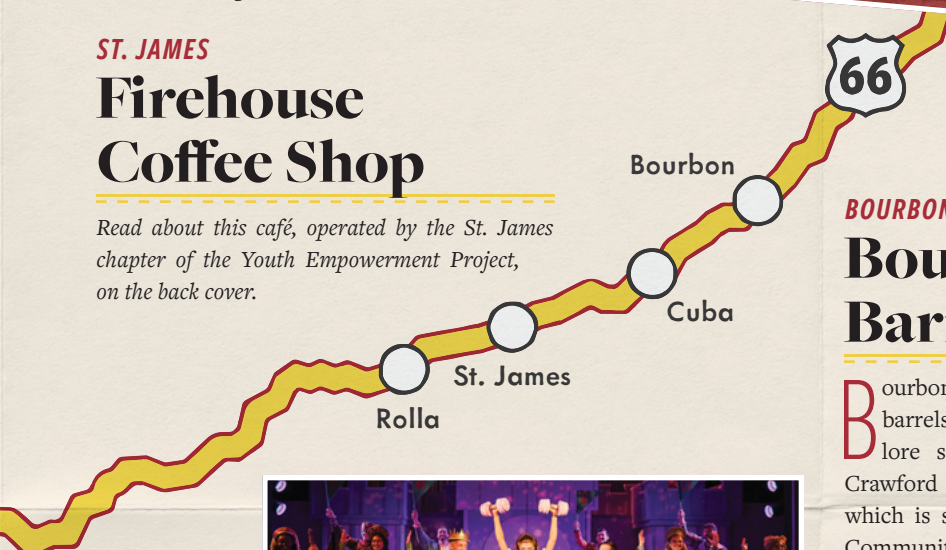


PHOTO BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

ST. JAMES

Firehouse Coffee Shop

Read about this café, operated by the St. James chapter of the Youth Empowerment Project, on the back cover.



PROVIDED

ROLLA

Ozark Actors Theatre

Since 1987, Ozark Actors Theatre has connected the Rolla community (and beyond) with the performing arts. The CFO nonprofit partner — which has received grants from the Meramec Regional Community Foundation — began out of a desire to bring quality professional theatre to the Ozarks. That dream has grown into a legacy: OAT is one of a few professional summer stock theatres in rural Missouri. It's also become a community fixture through more than 100 shows — ranging from comedies to full-scale musicals — and is recognized as an Equity Small Professional Theatre. In 2026, its summer season begins in June with "The Addams Family."

COMING SOON: PCCF Early Childhood Center

Helps County Community Foundation, the CFO's newest affiliate, partnered with Rolla Public Schools and Four Rivers Community Health Center to raise nearly \$2 million to open an early childhood education center. The new facility will expand preschool enrollment to all four-year-olds in the district and provide on-site access to medical and dental care. The center is expected to open in time for the 2026–27 school year.

BOURBON

Bourbon Barrel Tour

Bourbon's history is found in barrels all over town. Local lore says the name of the Crawford County community — which is served by the Bourbon Community Foundation and the Crawford County Foundation Inc. — originated because barrels (of bourbon) outside a store helped travelers identify where they were.

In 2019, that legend led Bourbon Economic Development to an idea: Why not place barrels around town, helping create a "visual identity" via local stops?

"Given our name, the bourbon barrel was the perfect canvas to showcase our local art and history," says Chuck Ray, president of BED. So far, 24 uniquely decorated barrels have been placed at locations with historical significance, high-traffic business areas and community hubs.

"We've been overwhelmed by the talent of the local artists ranging from our high school students to group members with metal working skills and talented wood artisans who stepped up to remodel these barrels," Ray says. He notes each barrel has its own personality, much like the town itself, and is characterized by suppliers being a local cooperation operation and Bourbon-based craft whiskey operation.

Future plans include property development of the Bourbon Barrel Tour trailhead, which is supported by a grant from the Crawford County Foundation's Impact 100 giving circle. When complete, the site — located on Route 66 and adjacent to the Bourbon Business/Community Development Center — will serve as an anchor for the barrel tour.

"Having this central hub allows us to welcome travelers from all over the globe, providing them with a gateway to explore our local history while boosting our economic vitality," Ray says.

"For Bourbon, these barrels are more than just decorations; they are landmarks. They serve as a physical bridge between our past and our future. By placing them at significant sites, we're prompting residents and visitors alike to pause and ask, 'What happened here?' It reinforces a sense of place and pride that is unique to our corner of the Ozarks."



PHOTO BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL



Investing for Impact

MISSION-RELATED INVESTMENTS
GENERATE NEW CAPITAL FOR
FUTURE COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Big ideas for community good often need capital, but organizations leading those projects don't always have access to funds to make them happen.

The Community Foundation of the Ozarks offers a solution through its Mission-Related Investment program, which provides loan options to nonprofits at below-market rates for projects that create a community benefit.

"Many nonprofits seeking financing through the MRI program are unable to access traditional bank loans due to balance sheet constraints or operating uncertainties typical of the sector," says Luis Leon, the CFO's chief financial officer and executive vice president. "The CFO plays a complementary role by filling this financing gap, rather than competing with local financial institutions."

Also known as "impact investing," the program invests in community needs that might not otherwise qualify for financing. As loans are repaid, the capital can be recycled and reinvested into new community priorities.

"To ensure prudent stewardship of charitable assets, nonprofit borrowers are required to offer collateral — typically in the form of a hard asset — as security for the loan," Leon notes. "In many cases, the CFO's initial participation helps build an organization's financial track record and credibility, positioning them to successfully pursue conventional financing for future projects. In this way, our involvement not only addresses immediate capital needs but also strengthens the long-term financial sustainability of nonprofit partners."

A CATALYST FOR HOUSING NEEDS

Restore SGF is a Springfield-based nonprofit that focuses on improving rates of local homeownership.

"We've got two main pillars of our mission: One is to increase home ownership and the other is to improve housing quality in Springfield," says Brendan Griesemer, Restore SGF's executive director. "We are looking at using housing as a neighborhood revitalization tool."



PHOTO BY AARON SCOTT

Brendan Griesemer leads Restore SGF, which recently established a revolving loan fund through the CFO's Mission-Related Investment program. Restore SGF works to support renovations — like at this home in the Grant Beach neighborhood — and improve home-ownership rates in Springfield.

The CFO committed \$500,000 from its MRI program to Restore SGF's Revolving Loan Fund. This catalyzed six local financial institutions to invest an additional \$2 million. With this fund, Restore SGF will either rehab existing housing or purchase property for new construction. Then, when those properties sell, the loan will be repaid.

"Basically, it's just like borrowing funds from a bank," Griesemer says. "When that is sold to that next homebuyer, when they repay that, it goes back into the fund. And then it just revolves back out. It becomes this continually revolving line of credit."

Having that funding is important to this effort's success, Griesemer says.

"We've got this consortium of banks and the Community Foundation that have come together to provide this capital to our organization," he says. "I don't know that we would get to a point to be able to do it on our own. I think that having that access to that capital for these types of projects is extremely important."

Though not supported by the revolving loan fund, Restore SGF also offers down payment assistance to first-time home buyers in qualifying situations, funding for "curb appeal" improvements, and accessibility improvements for senior citizens.

"Having all of these pieces together, in conjunction with each other, can begin to move the needle," Griesemer says of Springfield's home ownership realities. "You want new homeowners to raise the home-ownership rate in Springfield neighborhoods, but you also need to have good housing quality and good housing in those neighborhoods that people you know would like to move into. These are all pieces that fit together in this puzzle."

SUPPORTING REGIONAL IMPACT

Since the MRI program's inception, the

CFO has distributed about \$10 million to 28 entities across the region.

"It's great to be a part of the CFO's Mission-Related Investments committee and witness firsthand the many ways this program directly impacts nonprofits in the Ozarks with these creative financing solutions," says Steve Kelly, the committee's chair. "We have room to expand the program and are eager to find ways to help nonprofits grow their impact."

The list of projects includes:

- The purchase of an MRI machine to better serve patients at Salem Memorial District Hospital in Dent County, which received \$862,000 for the project.
- The expansion of the Jordan Valley Innovation Center, which was assisted by \$1.6 million in stop-gap funding allocated to the Missouri State University Foundation.
- The Respond, Recover, Rebuild Program, which the CFO launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided \$210,000 in bridge financing to five arts organizations facing temporary funding disruptions.
- In 2020, Ozark Greenways received financing to build a 1.4 mile section of the Fulbright Spring Greenway, providing a new recreational opportunity in Greene County.
- Watershed Committee of the Ozarks received a loan for start-up costs when it took over operations of Fellows Lake Marina in 2021.

"This program would not be possible without the leadership and oversight of the CFO Board of Directors and the Mission-Related Investments Committee," Leon says, noting a recent action of the CFO's board to increase the funds available for MRIs to more than \$6 million, which grows along with the CFO's primary investment pool. "The board's decision reflects a thoughtful balance between fiduciary stewardship and bold, mission-driven action."

—by Kaitlyn McConnell



PASSION *for* PROGRESS

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

STORIES & PHOTOS BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

Greg Carter

DIRECTOR · WEST PLAINS PUBLIC LIBRARY; BOARD MEMBER · COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF WEST PLAINS

Dr. Greg Carter, the West Plains Public Library director, recounts his first day of kindergarten: He told the teacher he was going to college. And he did — multiple times.



“I was one of the first in my family to get a college degree,” says Carter, who grew up in Howell County and is now a board member for the Community Foundation of West Plains. “That was always important to my parents — that I was educated — and it was always important to my parents that I had a book.”

After beginning at Missouri State University-West Plains, Carter taught locally and became a librarian.

“I want to make books magic for kids,” he says, recounting difficult situations such as poverty, foster care and abuse that he’s seen kids navigate.

He earned his doctorate to become a superintendent — but in 2023, he was asked if he’d lead the community’s library. One of his goals was accessibility: Fines were eliminated, reducing a barrier that might keep patrons away.

“I think sometimes we get this negative mindset about the public, when in reality, the public is good,” he says, noting that items are still returned. “I want them to use the library, so anything that may hinder them from using it, I try to take away.”

Such decisions contributed to the selection of West Plains Public Library as Missouri’s Library of the Year in 2025.

“Everyone loves their public library because we’re so much more than just books,” he says. “I had a guy come in that said, ‘I’m desperate for a job. I don’t know how to write a résumé,’ and we sat down and helped him. It’s things like that when you really make a big impact on people.”

Re Baker-Dietz

CEO & FOUNDER · ARROW CREATIVE REUSE – SPRINGFIELD

Re Baker-Dietz is in the business of creativity. In 2022, she led the start of Arrow Creative Reuse, a nonprofit thrift store for donated art supplies in Springfield. The mission is two-fold: It keeps the materials — yarn, fabric, old photos, frames, paint, eclectic gifts and more — out of landfills and gets them into creative hands at a fraction of the cost.



“With the current climate, art is more important than ever right now, and expression is how we stay human,” Baker-Dietz says. “That’s why this is such a force of nature right now. People need a place to go and come together and make things.”

That need is felt. The response to Arrow’s opening was so positive that the store relocated in late 2025 to a larger building. The move allowed the Shoe Tree Listening Room, an associated alcohol-free music venue, to join under the same roof.

Arrow is also home to classes and creative events like the Midwest MidBEST Crankie Fest. The annual festival, celebrating an old-fashioned storytelling format, is set to return in June. It has received funding from the Springfield Regional Arts Council’s Arts & Culture Grant Program, which is supported and administered by the CFO.

That said, much of Arrow’s work is supported by donation. In addition to the contributed supplies, volunteers — who comprise 90% of Arrow’s manpower — give time processing the materials. Financial donations are also welcome. That collective effort builds community.

“I stopped drinking seven years ago, and that was like a starting-over point for me,” she says. “I was like, ‘What am I going to do with myself and my life? I need to find something I enjoy, and I enjoy art and I enjoy getting supplies to people who need it.’ I really like helping people find things that they’re looking for.”

Micah Titterington

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRIES – BOLIVAR

Micah Titterington’s mission is to help people around Bolivar improve their lives by learning to help themselves. As executive director of Community Outreach Ministries, he oversees the faith-based nonprofit’s impact on food assistance, life improvement and skill development.



“For us, the goal is always, ‘How do we continue to deepen the layer of engagement and build relationships with those folks?’” he says.

Titterington moved to Bolivar years ago to attend Southwest Baptist University. After graduation, he went to Texas for graduate school before returning to Bolivar with his wife, assuming his COM mission in 2019.

Today, the nonprofit includes a food pantry, where clients can “shop” for their own food; classes on topics like banking and budgeting; a recycling program; and a thrift store.

Ultimately, COM is about dignity and helping clients help themselves. An example is COM’s first Christmas market, which sold toys at greatly reduced rates.

“The parents technically are still buying the gifts, but you might get a \$50 gift for \$5, so it becomes now affordable,” Titterington says, noting that they sat down with parents in advance to work out a budget and what they likely needed to save to spend. The market was a success, Titterington says, and adds the benefit of bringing clients into the process.

Another example is the thrift store, which supports COM’s mission with jobs, revenue and affordable goods, but also reinforces that those in need are needed, too.

“When someone shops in here, there’s no distinction between, ‘Oh, you’re poor or you’re not’ — you’re just a customer,” Titterington says. “It changes the dynamic, because now it’s not just that you need us for the affordable things. We actually need you (as a patron).”

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.



PHOTO BY KAITLYN MCCONNELL

Terrill Story, center, sponsors the St. James chapter of the Youth Empowerment Project. The student-led group operates the Firehouse Coffee Shop — located just off of historic Route 66 — to raise funds for grantmaking.

PARTING SHOT: A former fire station is now a destination for community in St. James, where the local chapter of the Youth Empowerment Project — the CFO’s program that teaches tenets of philanthropy to young people — operates Firehouse Coffee Shop.

For about 15 years, it’s evolved as a place to meet up with friends, hang out after school, or grab a cup before the next activity. It’s open to the community, so locals and travelers can drop by, too. The student workers are volunteers, and the funding they raise supports others.

Just one example: They funded two goats and a small motorcycle for a man who oversaw orphanages in Uganda. To really support that cause, they named a special drink after the man and mooded like a cow every time it was ordered. (They originally thought they would buy him a cow, but plans changed.)

“When I hear people go, ‘Our youth nowadays,’ I say, ‘Let’s do talk about our youth nowadays,’ says Terrill Story,

an art teacher at St. James High School and the YEP chapter sponsor. “I have like 20 students that just work for free, and they do great.”

“They need people to believe in them and encourage them and kind of prod them along and help direct them in the right ways — and love them in spite of the ways that they choose, too. They will know someone valued them and valued their worth and their desires.”

For the students, working in the colorful shop, adorned with artwork, builds a sense of connection and commitment.

“Volunteering here has actually been really good,” says Cat Murphy, one of the coffee shop’s volunteers. “It helped me get my first job. It looks really good on a résumé, especially if you haven’t had a previous job.”

And, at the end of the day, it comes back to helping others. As volunteer Jack Willis puts it, “We do this so we can feed other people.”

—by Kaitlyn McConnell