

Philanthropic Investment

In Our Community

In January, 2008, the Pfizer Foundation presented the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation with a \$1 million gift that was to be invested in our community by the end of 2009. We were thankful for the generous gift, the significant opportunity it presented, and the two-year time frame that allowed us to proceed deliberately and mindfully.

Because the Community Foundation has always worked in partnership with the nonprofit community and our donors, we were determined to ensure that the entire decision-making process was as comprehensive, transparent and inclusive as possible. In early 2008, our Board and staff launched a process by which we could effectively evaluate community needs, explore the entire continuum of options, gauge public opinion and priorities, and ultimately arrive at a strategy to grant \$1 million to our community in a strategically sound way.

The Community Foundation wanted to ensure that the Pfizer Foundation's gift would not only address those community needs deemed priorities, but would also support initiatives that promised to make a significant impact on our community and had the capacity to ensure long-term success and sustainability.

Throughout 2008 and into 2009, the Community Foundation's Board and staff held a series of conversations and meetings with hundreds of community members across all sectors of our region to seek their guidance, to assess community needs, and to gauge their priorities. In September, the Board convened a special session to review the breadth of community input we received.

Based upon what we had learned, AAACF's Board established a strategy that focused on three priorities and an open grant process that would solicit "Big Ideas" from the nonprofit sector.

Three Strategic Priorities

YPSILANTI RENEWAL

As our region's most challenged economy, AAACF felt it important to focus a meaningful portion of the Pfizer Foundation's gift toward promoting economic, educational and cultural renewal in Ypsilanti.

- **Ypsilanti Freighthouse** – see story on opposite page.

• **Early College Alliance**

AAACF awarded \$300,000 to the Early College Alliance (ECA) – a partnership with Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Lincoln, Milan and Whitmore Lake public schools, and Washtenaw Intermediate School District. ECA gives high school students, primarily from families that do not have a history of college completion, the opportunity to complete college-level work while still in high school. ECA currently serves 400 high school students on Eastern Michigan University's campus. AAACF's grant will fund the development of a new curricular strand, expand the program's capacity to serve more students, and will support a restructuring plan in the Ypsilanti Public Schools to better prepare students for ECA's program and college.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

AAACF awarded \$196,700 to the Washtenaw Success by 6 initiative which has made a firm commitment to prepare all young children in our area to succeed in school. With more than 60% of the County's children under the age of kindergarten participating in some form of licensed child-care, AAACF's grant will allow Washtenaw Success by 6 to dramatically expand their capacity to work with child care providers throughout Washtenaw County. Washtenaw Success by 6 will use this grant to expand specific training programs for child care providers, enhance their capability to evaluate their program's outcomes, and develop stronger public/private partnerships between agencies, childcare providers, relevant businesses, and parents throughout the County. Investing in young children today so that they are ready to start school as engaged students increases the likelihood of their long-term success and a hopeful future.

ARTS AND CULTURE

AAACF awarded \$200,000 to The Arts Alliance to help strengthen and expand its capacity to implement the Washtenaw Cultural Plan. The Arts Alliance serves the cultural community in the Ann Arbor region, working to create an environment where culture and creativity can flourish and to ensure that the arts are accessible to all. AAACF's grant is intended to strengthen The Alliance's organizational structure – to ensure it has the capacity to implement the Washtenaw Cultural Plan to promote the arts and culture as an important component in children's education and in revitalizing our local economy. Pfizer had long supported our region's cultural scene, recognizing it as one of its most valuable assets – enriching not only our quality of life but also our economic attractiveness and educational excellence.



Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse (FOYF):

Front Row: Peter Murdock (Ypsilanti City Council), Bonnie Penet (FOYF co-chair), Brenda Ridgon (Project Architect), Linda French, Nathalie Edmonds (FOYF co-chair), Elizabeth Marshall
Back Row: Phil D'Anieri (AAACF), Ron Rupert (Ypsilanti Historic District Commission), Ed Penet

Ypsilanti Freighthouse

Built in 1878 and listed on the State Register of Historic Places, the Ypsilanti Freighthouse has long played a vital role in the growth and development of the Depot Town area in Ypsilanti. Acquired in 1979 by the City of Ypsilanti, the Freighthouse has served as a multi-purpose gathering place for a wide variety of community and special events, including the Ypsilanti Farmers Market. Since 2004, when the City of Ypsilanti was forced to close the building because of safety concerns, restoring this local landmark and reopening it to the public has been a top priority for the Ypsilanti community.

AAACF awarded \$101,300 to the Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse who took over management of the historic structure with the hope of restoring the building and reopening it to the public.

AAACF's grant will fund the "soft-costs" involved in generating a detailed set of architectural drawings and engineering blueprints to bring the project to shovel-ready status. A comprehensive restoration plan will play an important part in communicating the project's viability and promise, especially in attracting future funding. As we go to print, FOYF just received news that the Freighthouse will receive \$500,000 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act – an investment that makes the Freighthouse's reopening a reality. We look forward to the restoration of this beloved historic place and community resource and the sense of community renewal that an open Freighthouse promises for Ypsilanti and Depot Town.