

Brighter picture for services



Mail Tribune / Jim Craven

Charles Skupeen of Medford helps his 3-year-old granddaughter, Hope Bruni of Ashland, with painting during a class at the Rogue Gallery in Medford. The gallery is one of a number of organizations to receive money from local grants.

With new money sources, nonprofits breathe a bit easier

By Jonel Aleccia

If Northwest philanthropy is like a pie, Southern Oregon nonprofit agencies have had to content themselves for decades with small slices and far-flung crumbs.

This year, for the first time, the region will boast more home-grown bakers than ever before. Judy Barnes and others hungry for new money couldn't be happier.

"This will make a big difference," says Barnes, the director of the Rogue Gallery of Medford. Her agency recently received \$10,000 to create an endowment and \$2,000 for a new project from the newly established Anna May Foundation of Medford. "For the most part, we've ended up going north."

Suddenly, however, seeking funds right here in Southern Oregon is a more viable option for area agencies, thanks to creation of endowments or funds with assets totaling nearly \$23 million. All told, those sources could inject nearly \$800,000 this year into local social service coffers.

That effectively matches the amount distributed annually by the \$19.5 million Carpenter Foundation, Medford's longtime nonprofit icon.

"For Southern Oregon, we are definitely in a new place," said Kathy Bryon, executive director of the Gordon Elwood Foundation of Medford.

That agency was funded last year after Elwood, a self-described miser, died at age 79, leaving behind a \$9 million legacy for social services.

Though it's by far the largest bequest, the Elwood Foundation is not the only new fund. In fact, it's one of nearly a half-dozen new entities aimed at supporting local services.

"It's sort of dramatic because there's so much of it," said Kathleen Davis, field representative for the Oregon Community Foundation. "It means a lot to Southern Oregon."

Mostly it means more money to a region where an estimated 300 nonprofit agencies try to thrive in a fiercely competitive funding atmosphere.

"The truth is, there's tremendous need," said Stephanie Soares-Pump, executive director of Southern Oregon Drug Awareness, a prevention agency. "Any time there's a new resource, we all jump at it."

For years, the most-tapped resource has been the Carpenter Foundation, the family foundation formed in 1942 and dedicated to offering not only money but mentorship to agencies that serve public good.

Jane Carpenter, the 85-year-old president of the foundation, says she's pleased at the influx of new resources, but as worried as ever about the need that dwarfs it.

As proof, she points to Gov. John Kitzhaber's recently released budget, which offsets a \$700 million spending gap with huge cuts in human services.

"It's a very serious kind of depletion and to such a degree that I don't think any foundations that we have can possibly fill the void," she said.

The dilemma is echoed by Russ Levin, development director for the Britt Music Festivals in Jacksonville. All nonprofit agencies, regardless of their mission, are feeling the twin pressures of more need and less support, he said.

"There's a lot more demand all across the Rogue Valley," he said. "As government has backed out of certain areas, social service agencies have stepped in to fill the void. But now all of these groups are competing. Is it going to be a homeless shelter or is it going to be a classical music concert for kids?"

Whatever money the agencies are able to acquire, it pales in comparison to the importance of private giving, noted Bill Thorndike Jr., Medford businessman and OCF board member. Nationally and in Oregon, about 80 percent of all contributions come from small, private donations. Another 10 percent comes from wills. Only the remaining 10 percent is provided by grants.

"The caveat is that while we're very fortunate now, none of us should say, 'Oh, good, I don't have to support such and such program because the fat cats are doing it,'" said Thorndike.

Still, funds from "fat cat" donors can't help but seem like good news to nonprofit leaders such as Barnes. Distance, she said, often has kept Southern Oregon agencies from gaining the funding offered more urban entities.

"When we're going to the large foundations, they're up north and so few of them ever see what we're doing," she said. "Whatever we put on paper, it's so hard for them to feel the life of it."

Even experienced, well-connected administrators face that dilemma, noted Arnie Green, executive director of Community Works, a Medford social service agency. Green has spent a quarter-century lobbying for programs and funding at state and national levels. His agency recently received more than \$600,000 in grants for construction of an Ashland family center, but he still struggles for funds.

"We've had some success, but we haven't had anywhere near the success that our sister agencies in the Portland area have had," he said. "Their offices are in Portland, and it's a different perspective when they're in your back yard."

Consequently, there's a sense of excitement among nonprofit leaders as they contemplate the possibilities of new funds.

"You feel like you're more competitive and you feel like the people want to do something in their very own communities," said Marj Jameson, executive director of the local chapter of the American Red Cross.

Jameson is hoping the Gordon Elwood Foundation will provide a \$20,000 boost to Red Cross disaster services during its next funding cycle.

Green is hoping the Anna May Foundation will come up with money to continue HelpLine, a regional crisis line.

And Soares-Pump is still scanning grant applications and RFPs — requests for proposals — for funds to fit her

projects.

"You see them and then you sit down at the computer and start writing," she said.

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