

# 2024 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



Built on a Foundation of Homegrown Generosity

## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2024 was a remarkable year for the Fond du Lac Area Foundation, marked by an outpouring of generosity and a deep commitment to our community. We saw strong support for local nonprofit organizations, with significant contributions from our dedicated donors. We were also thrilled to welcome several new funds and gifts, expanding our capacity to make a difference. These successes are a testament to the spirit of giving that thrives in Fond du Lac.

As we celebrate our milestone 50th anniversary year in 2025, we're embarking on an exciting new chapter. We will be developing a comprehensive strategic plan to guide our work for the next several years. This process will be crucial as we recognize the increasing challenges facing our nonprofit partners. They are experiencing a surge in community needs while simultaneously navigating a complex funding landscape. Adapting to these evolving needs and identifying sustainable resources will be paramount.

Our strategic plan will focus on how the Foundation can best support these organizations. We will explore innovative approaches to grantmaking, capacity building, and community engagement. We are committed to being a proactive partner, working alongside our nonprofits to address the most pressing issues facing Fond du Lac. We invite you to join us on this journey as we celebrate 50 years of impact and look forward to a future of continued service.



Greg Giles  
Executive Director

### **VISION**

*The Fond du Lac Area Foundation will support efforts to enhance the quality of life in the Fond du Lac Area.*

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

*Creating a better community by promoting philanthropy, awarding effective grants, and providing leadership on important community issues ... today and forever.*

*Staff at Ronald McDonald House  
Charities of Eastern Wisconsin*



## BUILDING THE FOND DU LAC AREA FOUNDATION: 1975-2025

Planting deep roots over the past 50 years has allowed the Fond du Lac Area Foundation to build the strength and stability needed for sustained growth.

By establishing a strong foundation of trust, transparency, and community connection, we have been able to expand our capacity and deepen relationships with donors, partners, and neighbors. From our modest beginning with a \$50,000 endowment fund, we have grown to nearly **\$80 million in assets** and steward almost **600 charitable funds** that serve a broad and diverse range of needs. Our reach now extends well beyond Fond du Lac County, with meaningful impact felt in surrounding communities across the region.

As we celebrate this milestone year, we remain focused on the future. We are creating a refined strategic plan that will elevate our core values and align our work with bold, forward-thinking priorities. This continued evolution reflects both where we started and where we're headed: *always rooted in community, always growing with purpose.*

## BE A PART OF THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Are you curious to learn more about our history, mission, and what the future holds for the Fond du Lac Area Foundation, our donors, and our community partners?

Let's connect!



**ON THE COVER** The Fond du Lac Area Foundation planted its roots and operated out of the home of Carl and Delnia Tonjes at 169 14th Street, Fond du Lac, WI from 1975 to 1989.

**Founding board members** included Carl Tonjes, Allan Edgarton, George Becker, C. L. Ludden, Marian Petri, Bernard Schreiner, Ellen Humleker, and David Wilson.



Our **establishing gift** was a \$50,000 endowment from the disbanded Children's Home that was formerly located on Follett and Macy.

To **build a team**, Jan Schmidt was hired as executive director in 1989. In 1993, Sandi Roehrig joined the staff before becoming executive director in 1995. Sue Steinbarth joined the staff in 1995 acting as accounts executive and executive assistant.



## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

At the Fond du Lac Area Foundation, we deeply value our **partnerships** in all forms — whether through our regional affiliates, charitable funds from neighboring counties, or collaborations with local organizations. Working together allows us to amplify our impact, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively to address community needs. By fostering strong relationships across county lines, we create opportunities for shared learning, innovative solutions, and sustainable change.

Our partnerships help us expand our reach, allowing us to support more individuals, families, and initiatives that make a difference. Collaboration strengthens our ability to respond to emerging challenges and leverage funding where it is needed most. When we work together, we maximize the power of philanthropy, ensuring that generosity leads to lasting and meaningful results.



## FONDY 100 GIVES - 2024 AWARDEES



**Badgerland Youth for Christ** used their Fondy 100 Gives grant for the Camps Life program. The grant allowed them to launch an additional branch of the program at a local middle school. The grant was slated to cover staffing, training, program materials, snacks, and promotion.



**Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts** used their grant to create a new (and free) entertainment and art event during Fondue Fest. The event was hosted in front of Thelma on Sheboygan Street and included aerial dance performances and an LED fire juggling show.



**Rebuilding Tomorrow's** grant assisted with fall prevention efforts, such as installing grab bars, bathtub transfer benches, toilet seat risers, anti-slip products, and night lights. The fall prevention program reduces the burden on fire/rescue, emergency departments, and healthcare providers.



**Solutions Center**, in partnership with the St. Katharine Drexel Shelter, used their grant for the Drexel Youth Empowerment Program to support youth that are staying at the shelter. This educational program connects youth to essential services and disrupts the cycles of violence and poverty.



## THE J FUND

For Jan Schmidt, Taylor Park was more than just a neighborhood park—it was a second home. As a young girl, she spent her summers splashing in the pool, competing in games, and embracing the friendships and lessons that only a community gathering place can provide. She learned to swim there, and as a teenager, she became one of the original members of the Taylor Maids water ballet program. Later, she stepped into a leadership role, teaching lifesaving skills and choreographing graceful performances for the next generation of swimmers.

Her love for Taylor Park never faded, and her husband, Dave, knew just how much those summers meant to her. That's why, in 2007, the couple established **The J Fund** at the Fond du Lac Area Foundation. The fund provides annual financial support for the Taylor Park pool, ensuring that children today — and in the years to come — can experience the same joy and growth that Jan once did.

*"When I was a tween and teen, Taylor Park was my summer home," Jan reflects. "This fund is my way of giving back to something that was so important to me. It will live on long after I am gone."*

Thanks to The J Fund, Taylor Park will remain a place where children can make lifelong memories—just as Jan did all those years ago.

Since 2007,  
The J Fund  
has awarded  
**\$18,347**  
in grants to  
support  
Taylor Park.

In 2023, Jan  
Schmidt was  
awarded the  
Fond du Lac  
Area  
Foundation  
Legacy Award.



Jan served as the  
Foundaiton's  
executive  
director from  
1989 to 1995.



## ELAINE & ROBERT MIDDLETON FUND

Robert and Elaine Middleton built a life centered on love, hard work, and giving back. Robert married his sweetheart, Elaine, on his birthday — a date he'd never forget. In 1960, they moved from Milwaukee to Brownsville, embracing their new home with open hearts. Both were dedicated employees of Allis-Chalmers; Robert worked 43 years in the machine shop while Elaine spent 37 years as a crane operator. Community-minded and kind, they traveled Wisconsin, supporting local causes. Without children, they ensured their legacy lived on through the **Elaine & Robert Middleton Fund**, a designated fund benefiting the communities they cherished.

As you walk the trails of Hobb's Woods – a treasured park in the southwest corner of Fond du Lac County – you will witness first-hand the power of charitable giving. The **Robert and Elaine Middleton Fund's** impact continues to ripple across Fond du Lac County, thanks to a **\$60,000** grant that supported the replacement of footbridges in Hobbs Woods. The multi-year pledge, paid in \$20,000 increments over three years, accelerated the upgrade of three bridges, reducing the project timeline from six years to just three.

This grant not only transformed the bridges but also freed up budgeted funds for additional park enhancements. Visitors now enjoy improved trails, new picnic tables, and benches, all fostering greater community use of the park. The grant even made possible the installation of the County Parks system's first Little Free Library, encouraging a love of reading and community connection.

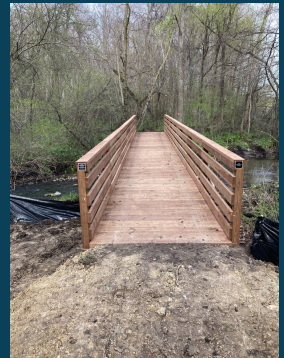
By establishing the Middleton Fund, Elaine and Robert created a legacy of lasting impact. Their foresight demonstrates how charitable funds empower individuals to shape their community for generations, ensuring their values and generosity live on.

## GRANTS BENEFITTING HOBBS WOODS



BEFORE  
←.....

.....→  
AFTER



# HONORING THE LEGACY OF MADAME JOANNE THORKELSON

For more than three decades, Madame Joanne Thorkelson inspired students in the Fond du Lac School District to embrace the beauty of world languages. Her passion for teaching French, her dedication to her students, and her deep love for travel shaped the lives of countless young people who walked through her classroom doors. Even after her passing on December 26, 2022, Joanne's impact endures through the **Madame Joanne Thorkelson Legacy Scholarship**, a testament to her lifelong commitment to education.



Joanne's journey as an educator began after earning her degrees from St. Norbert College and the University of Northern Iowa. She taught French and English at Mishicot High School from 1965 to 1968 before dedicating the next 32 years to teaching French in the Fond du Lac School District. Known fondly as "Madame Thorkelson," she instilled in her students an appreciation for language, culture, and the wider world beyond their hometowns.

Beyond the classroom, Joanne found joy in gardening, walking through her neighborhood, and sharing conversations with friends. She adored her dogs and had a deep appreciation for travel, always eager to explore new cultures and experiences.

Her generosity now lives on through an extraordinary legacy: a **\$600,000 endowed fund providing \$20,000 in annual scholarships**. These scholarships ensure that young people with a passion for world languages can pursue their dreams.

Scholarships like these play a critical role in opening doors for students who may not otherwise have the means to pursue higher education. They provide financial relief, encourage academic excellence, and ensure that talented individuals can follow their passions without the burden of financial constraints. A fund like Joanne's is more than just a scholarship—it is a lasting tribute to her values and dedication to education.

The Fond du Lac Area Foundation takes great pride in serving as a steward of such legacy funds. By managing and growing these resources responsibly, the Foundation upholds its trusted commitment to honoring donors' wishes, ensuring that their impact continues for generations to come. Through Madame Thorkelson's fund, her love of language and learning will continue shaping students' futures, exemplifying the power of philanthropy to make a lasting difference.

# HOW DOES THE FOND DU LAC AREA FOUNDATION WORK?

## IT STARTS WITH DONORS

- Individuals
- Businesses
- Private foundations
- Nonprofit agencies

## WITH A PASSION

- Arts
- Education
- Environment
- Health & wellness
- Community programs

## WHO USE THEIR GIFTS

- Cash
- Real estate
- Securities
- Life insurance
- Bequests
- Retirement funds

## TO CREATE FUNDS

## DISTRIBUTIONS

FROM THE FUND  
FULFILL THE DONOR'S  
CHARITABLE PASSIONS  
THROUGH:

- Grants
- Scholarships

## HERE TO HELP Foundation TEAM

- **Meets** with donors to determine which type of fund is right for their goals.
- **Assists** donors with giving complex gifts.
- **Helps** donors grow funds.
- **Provides** online access to fund activity.
- **Offers** expertise on community needs.
- **Preserves** donor wishes.

## FUND OPTIONS

- Unrestricted
- Donor advised
- Designated
- Agency
- Scholarship
- Field of interest



The **Legacy Award** honors those who have significantly impacted the quality of life in the Fond du Lac area through outstanding community philanthropy.

### 2024 Legacy Award Ahern Gross Plumbing



## FUNDS ESTABLISHED IN 2024

\*denotes Beaver Dam Area Community Foundation

### SCHOLARSHIP

Carol Lynn Neuman Scholarship Fund\* | DAJJ Memorial Scholarship Fund | Fond du Lac Area Retired Educators Association Scholarship | Fox Valley Savings Bank Scholarship Fund | Friends of Horicon Marsh Education & Visitor Center Scholarship Fund | George and Mary Becker Scholarship Fund | JF Ahern Scholarship Fund | Olsen-Winkler Family Scholarship | Patti Pelischek Memorial Scholarship Fund | Richard A. Knar, Sr. Scholarship Fund | Warbirds Hockey Scholarship | Waupun Area FFA & Agricultural Education Foundation | Woodland Fire Rescue Scholarship

### DONOR ADVISED

Andy and Tracy Propst Family Fund\* | Dr. Marilyn Kay Thomas Fund\* | Ed and Linda Nill Family Fund | Greg and Kathy Armstrong Family Fund\* | Jim and Cathy Wolfe Legacy Fund | John and Linda Schroeder Family Fund | John K. and Sandra J. Wright Memorial Fund | K-C Farms Legacy Fund | McFarlane Family Fund | Richard & Ines Kerch Legacy Fund | The Jindra Family Fund\* | The Lunde Family Fund\* | Wendy Koepp Legacy Fund

### AGENCY

Beaver Dam Loaves and Fishes Fund\* | Beaver Dam Police Department Equipment & Training Fund\* | City of Beaver Dam Fire Prevention & Training Fund\* | City of Ripon "Rony's Recruit" K-9 Fund | Community Care Expansion Furnishing Fund\* | Fond du Lac Area Women's Non-Endowed Fund | Fond du Lac County General Parks Fund | Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office Armored Rescue Vehicle Fund | Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office Crisis Therapy Dog Fund | Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office K9 Fund | Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office Shop with a Cop Fund | Fond du Lac County Veterans Park Fund | Fox Lake Living Hope Food Pantry Fund\* | Little White Schoolhouse Endowed Fund | Little White Schoolhouse Legacy Center Fund | PATH of Hustisford, Inc Fund\* | The Arc of Dodge County, Inc. Fund\* | The Beaver Dam Hockey Association\* | The Blandine House, Inc. Fund | The Village of Brandon Fund | Village of Brandon Park Improvements Fund | Warbirds Hockey Fund | Watermark Community Center Fund\*

### DESIGNATED

3Rescues of FDL Stray Animal Medical Fund | Bob and Sandy Roell Fund\* | Cheryl Mohr Big Cup Golf Outing Fund | Oris E. & Elaine A. Possin Charitable Fund\* | Stone Family Foundation WLA Fund

### FIELD OF INTEREST

Joseph Berger, Jr. Memorial Book Fund

### UNRESTRICTED

Robert and Mary Binning Fund

### 2024 Carl Tonjes Inspired Giving Award Teresa Keenan



The **Carl Tonjes Inspired Giving Award** honors trailblazers who go above and beyond for their community and have brought about real possibility, change, and hope for Fond du Lac County (and beyond).

# GRANT IMPACT IN 2024

## GRANT CYCLE I

**\$89,900**

awarded to **35**  
Fond du Lac  
County nonprofits



Ronald McDonald House Charities of Eastern Wisconsin was able to provide 53 Fond du Lac area families with a place to call home for 573 nights close to the care their children needed.

## GRANT CYCLE II

**\$42,200**

awarded to **16**  
Fond du Lac  
County nonprofits



Fond du Lac Area Women's Fund hosted a series of three Community Conversations, fostering collaboration and solutions to advance equity for Fond du Lac area women and girls.

## IMPACT GRANT

**\$160,000**

awarded to **5**  
Fond du Lac  
County nonprofits



Children's Museum of Fond du Lac was granted \$45,000 for the Light Wonders Gallery, featuring a sensory room, giant Lite-Brite wall, and mind and motion exhibits.

## RURAL VITALITY GRANT

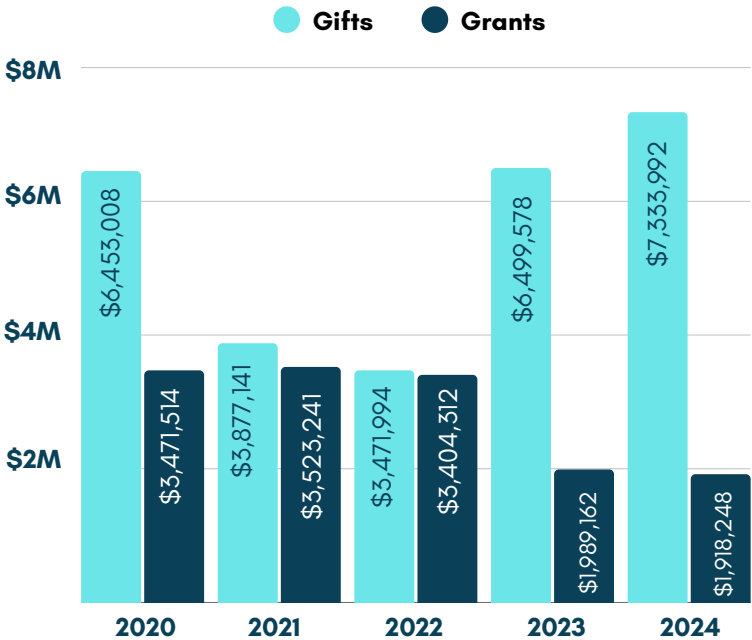
**\$50,000**

awarded to **7**  
Fond du Lac &  
Dodge County  
nonprofits



Salute the Troops received \$10,000 to support the Vetreprenuer Project, empowering veterans in entrepreneurship. Rural Vitality Grants are made possible thanks to Compeer Financial.

GRANTS AWARDED AND GIFTS RECEIVED



NEW FUNDS

57

SCHOLARSHIP AWRDED

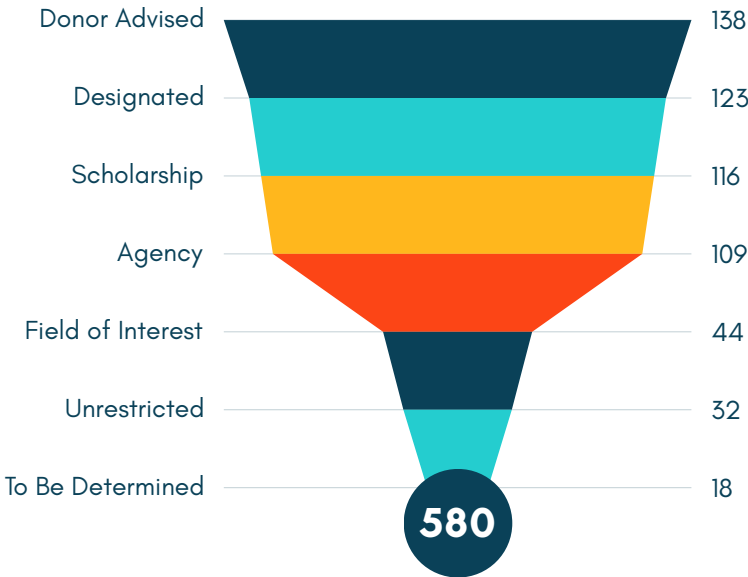
253

SCHOLARSHIP DOLLARS

\$348K

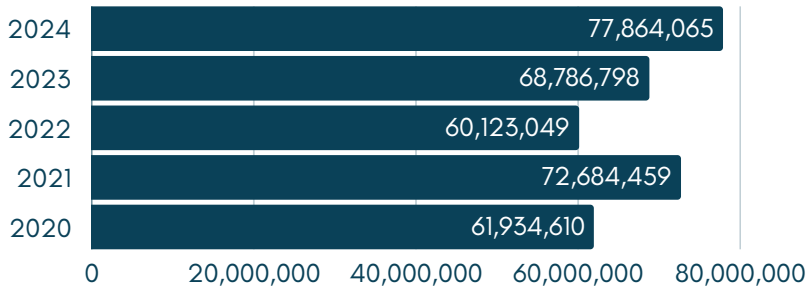
FAMILY OF FUNDS

BY FUND TYPE



FOUNDATION ASSETS

BY FISCAL YEAR





## **Fond du Lac Area Foundation**

1020 S. Main Street, Suite E  
Fond du Lac, WI 54935

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Loree Shady, *Chair*  
Tripp Ahern  
Sara B. Andrew, *Secretary*  
Holly Brenner  
Dawn Colwin  
Steven Franke, *Treasurer*  
Thomas Gross  
David Hornung  
Therese Massey  
Steven Millin, *Vice Chair*  
Kelly Norton  
John Schroeder

### **STAFF**

#### **Jackie Drake**

Scholarships & Program Associate

#### **Greg Giles**

Executive Director

#### **Molly Waldschmidt Jaster**

Marketing Manager

#### **Erin Mueller**

Business Manager

#### **Kayla Schumacher**

Donor Relations Manager

#### **Jenny Zacherl**

Donor Relations & Grants Associate

**CFNS**

ACCREDITED  
FOUNDATION