



Fort Foundation Focus

by Fred A. Rose, Volunteer Publicist

www.fortfoundation.org

On January 25th the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation held its *Annual Meeting and Reception* at the Fireside, a new tradition started last year. This event allows the Foundation to express its appreciation to its many donors and to reinforce the strong bonds of support and camaraderie that unite the present and past citizens of Fort Atkinson. The event includes a donation by the Fireside of hors d'oeuvres, and a beverage.

In a presentation before the event, Rick Kloplic, Chairman of the Foundation Board this year, emphasized the history of the Foundation. He recalled that the Foundation was started in 1973 with a donation of \$25,000. It has grown over the years, sometimes with major donations, but also because of the steady generosity of the citizens of the community.

In addition, Mr. Kloplic presented a list of projects funded in whole or in part by the Foundation; a list that included recent items such as the \$1,900,000 grant for restoration and expansion of the Hoard Historical Museum, \$250,000 to the Fort Hospital expansion project, two thirds of the funding for the High School Bell Tower Memorial, and others. Before and after Mr. Kloplic's presentation, an automated slide show documented more than 50 other recent projects funded by the Foundation, including some very visible ones such as an addition to the Glacial River Bike Trail, and several enhancements thereto, historical markers in town, and the restoration of the historic old Water Tower near the Middle School.

It has been this writer's pleasure to tell business colleagues from elsewhere, in the US and abroad, about the Foundation and its assets, and invariably to notice their astonishment at the size of the Foundation and the magnitude of what it has done for the community. Its assets now top \$20,000,000, a very sizeable and enviable amount for a city of less than 12,000! In addition to the support of community improvement projects detailed above, the Foundation awarded more than \$154,000 in scholarships last year.

Part of the spectacular success of the Fort Foundation in achieving such a large donation base, and in being such an active and positive force in the community, is its very wise organization. From its inception it was organized somewhat differently from many community foundations. A majority of such foundations are governed by a large board of

directors, membership upon which is determined by past large contributions.

In contrast, the Fort Foundation board consists of only five members, each of whom is appointed for a term of just five years. Appointments to the board are made, in turn, by the City Council, the School Board, the trustee institutions, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Historical Society. The appointees are specifically instructed that they do not "represent" the group that appointed them, but rather, that they are to collectively use their judgement and experience to provide wise guidance for the Foundation's work.

Early on, the Foundation also adapted a very wise practice regarding the funding of projects. The reader can imagine the wide variety of proposals that are submitted for funding. The value to the community of some proposals is obvious. However, some other projects, though desirable, appear to be the passion of a smaller group of people within the community. Therefore, one must ask, "How wide is the support for this project?" Actually determining the base of such support would be a daunting task fraught with potential conflicts.

In these cases, the Foundation often funds such projects with a matching grant. In other words, they let the community members vote with their check books. Typically the challenge is, "For every dollar your committee raises for this project, the Foundation will contribute another." A stroke of genius! No inherently difficult and potentially biased judgements need be applied by a small group of people. No polls need be taken. It is a form of election process that costs nothing, and is obviously the ultimate test of public support!

Again, in this writer's experience from talking to a wide variety of persons active in large and small communities, the combination of wise original organization, its generosity, and its wise methods of analyzing the worthiness of projects set it aside from the majority of community foundations. We have a treasure here in Fort Atkinson that deserves the support of every citizen.

Anyone needing more information, or who would like to make a donation to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation, is asked to contact Helen Rose, Program Administrator, at 920-563-3210 (office), 920-563-4926 (home), or visit the Foundation's Web site at www.fortfoundation.org.