



Fort Foundation Focus

By Jennifer Mertens, volunteer publicist

The fireflies in Fort Atkinson will be lighting up the sky for many years to come, thanks to an organization committed to making the city's future shine. Completed during the summer of 2002, the "Fireflies" sculpture on the corner of Riverside Drive and Robert Street is one of many projects supported by the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation.

This column is part of the Foundation's new initiative to make its work better known throughout the community. It will be published quarterly in the Daily Jefferson County Union, informing readers on upcoming fundraising events, donor opportunities and, of course, the many projects supported by the Foundation.

The Fort Atkinson Community Foundation began in 1973 when an anonymous individual wished to donate \$25,000 to the city. There was no organization in place to handle such a donation. As a result, the non-profit Fort Atkinson Community Foundation was founded and has been making generous donations enriching the city's cultural and economic landscape ever since then.

This same individual also believed the future needs of the growing community were unable to be foreseen. Consequently the organization had to be structured to provide the continuity and credible leadership that would respond to community needs with the help of caring contributors.

Also in 1973, the residents of the Fort Atkinson area were presented with a formal Declaration of Trust and set of By-Laws for the newly established Community Foundation. As stated in the declaration, the purpose of the foundation is to, "receive and accept property exclusively for educational, cultural, charitable or benevolent purposes for the benefit and improvement of residents of the Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, metropolitan area in such a way that the quality of life in the Fort Atkinson metropolitan area shall be enhanced."

If community organizations ceased to exist, this first donor wanted to ensure the donations made were used for similar interests as originally intended. This standard is in effect yet today. For example, if money were donated for the benefit of the Campfire Girls and the group does not exist at the time it is to be dispersed, the funds would be given to the Girl Scouts or other girls' organization with similar objectives.

Since the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation is a benevolent trust, donations given are tax deductible for the contributor. As another benefit, the foundation is not required to spend its yearly income within that fiscal year. The fund is able to accrue so larger gifts may be bestowed upon the community when needed.

Five dedicated community members are appointed to serve on the Community Foundation Board of Directors. One each is appointed by the Board of Education, School District of Fort Atkinson; Trustee of the Foundation; Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce; Fort Atkinson Historical Society; and City Council of Fort Atkinson. The current board consists of Ted Batterman, President; Leona Chadwick, Vice-President; Don Henning, Rick Klopocz and Philip Jones. These volunteers are chosen for their community involvement and knowledge of the educational, cultural, civic, moral, public and charitable needs of this thriving city. Only the five directors have voting rights. Terms of office are five years and no board member may succeed his or herself after term expiration. James Vance is secretary and legal counsel. Helen Rose is Program Administrator.

The Community Foundation raises money for various projects, primarily by donations. Its first fund-raising event, a production of "Romeo and Juliet" by Sparling Theatrical Productions, was held July 17-18 at the Fort Atkinson High School Auditorium. It was a successful venture, raising approximately \$2,000 for Foundation projects. The show was free to the public, though

sponsored by the Foundation, which collected donations at the door. Annual fund-raising events will be planned and announced at a later date.

Donations are given to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation, directed to the trustee banks, which handle investment and disbursement of the Foundation's assets. The First American Bank of Fort Atkinson, now PremierBank, was originally appointed trustee because it was the only bank in Fort Atkinson with a Trust Department at that point in time. In 2000, Citizens State Bank & Trust became a trustee for some funds. It is anticipated that Johnson Bank will become a trustee sometime in the near future.

Proposals for future Foundation projects are presented at its quarterly meetings, the next to be held January 15, 2004. Grant request deadlines are the 15th of the month, preceding the quarterly Board of Directors meeting. This year the Board has made it an option to do a site visit of the area for which the grant funds were requested. Previously, the board relied solely on presentations from the public to make their decisions regarding donations. This new initiative allows a board member to see firsthand the project and submit findings and impressions to the board. The board member chosen to preview each project is selected based on interest, talents and familiarity with the proposed project.

A few recent projects funded in whole or part by the Foundation include new playground equipment at Barrie Elementary School, an opportunity for all Fort Atkinson public elementary school students to attend two performances sponsored by Jefferson's Council for the Performing Arts, improvements and land acquisition at Dorothy Carnes Park, the Community Wetland Walk, improvements to the baseball and softball fields at Fort Atkinson High School, assistance to Jefferson County Emergency Communications, Inc. for purchase of a new command vehicle, equipment for the Jefferson County Literacy Council, directional signs placed throughout the city, the new soccer fields behind Luther Elementary School and in collaboration with the Fort Atkinson Rotary Club, the Rotary Club shelter at Rock River Park.

In addition, over \$3 million in 18 separate scholarship funds is available to area students, accounting for approximately 19 percent of the Foundation's assets. In 2003, forty-four Fort Atkinson area students were awarded a total of \$186,200 in scholarships from the Foundation's funds for both undergraduate and advanced studies. The majority of the scholarship funds are endowed, signifying that only the earnings and appreciation are used, allowing the fund to last in perpetuity.

In addition, the Board has recently adopted an initiative for the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation to be a pro-active force in the community. The Board is focusing on the need for a Youth Center, a project that the Foundation feels it can support by providing financial assistance as well as supplying a leadership role. The Foundation is currently studying implementation options.

Donations to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation of cash or stocks and bonds can be mailed to 244 N. Main St., Fort Atkinson, WI 53538. Information on setting up a Donor Advised Fund as well as planned giving information may be obtained by calling (920)563-3210 or writing to the above address.

Applications for grant requests are available by calling (920) 563-3210; or e-mailing facf@idcnet.com.

Visit the Foundation's Web site at www.fortfoundation.org for more information and look for continuing coverage of the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation's happenings in future columns in the Daily Jefferson County Union. All comments and inquiries are welcome.