

# CONNECT

Fall/Winter 2021



## THE DEFROST PROJECT

Milan Community  
Foundation grant helps  
freeze time and thaw  
connections.

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Pictured: Judi stops at the park on her way to the time capsule open house in Milan as part of The Defrost Project.

*Writing Southwest Minnesota's Success Story*

*Celebrating 35 Years*



**SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE  
FOUNDATION**

# A 35-YEAR RELATIONSHIP

President/CEO Diana Anderson

One of the people I admire is John A. Powell. He grew up in Detroit, Michigan as the sixth of nine children, played basketball and ran track in high school, and ran track in college. He is a traveler, author, speaker, professor and the director of the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley. Southwest Initiative Foundation believes that dignity and belonging are core human values, and John's work really aligns with this belief.

In an interview, he said, "The human condition is one about belonging. We simply cannot thrive unless we are in relationship."

Southwest Initiative Foundation has formed incredible relationships over the last 35 years. The work has changed over decades as we flex, innovate and become what our communities and region need us to be. We've seen this as programs sunset, new initiatives take off, and challenges rise up and change our way of thinking and doing our work day-to-day. We need what each person brings to the table, what you have to offer. You are what makes this a special place to belong.

Our relationships are something we're celebrating as we mark our 35th anniversary this year. They're also what's leading us forward, into what's next. Forged in an economic crisis, we've collaborated with businesses since the beginning. Those relationships paved the way for a new program we're introducing to our region - and the state! The new Southwest Initiative Employer Resource Network® matches both short- and long-term economic development strategies for our communities, businesses, families and kids from cradle to career. You can read more about it in this issue of CONNECT.

Some of our closest relationships in the region are with our affiliate partners. I was lucky to help launch



Diana Anderson, President/CEO

that program when I started at SWIF, and this year many of our affiliates had key milestones. The Hutchinson Area Community Foundation endowment reached \$1 million, a permanent resource for the benefit of community. The Madison Community Foundation marked its 20th anniversary, with grants totaling more than \$625,000 invested across the community. After four years of fundraising and construction, the Darwin Community Legacy Foundation dedicated the Darwin Veterans Memorial this fall in partnership with local community organizations. And in this issue, you'll find a feature about our partner the Milan Community Foundation and its creative efforts to engage our kids in community building. Hats off to all our volunteer advisory board members for their leadership in the region!

As I thought about becoming a part of Southwest Initiative Foundation more than 20 years ago, I knew it was the right fit when the complexity of all that SWIF does didn't feel complex to me at all. In my mind, the work that we do is all connected by the underlying concepts of asset building and leadership development. Thanks for being part of this important work, and for being in relationship with SWIF. We're looking forward to year 36 with you!

CONNECT  
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We've added many new initiatives in the past 35 years, like Welcoming Week. Celebrations across the region this year helped build belonging to support vibrant, welcoming communities our kids need to succeed. In Glencoe, kids lined up to take a swing at piñatas.

## You have no idea the impact YOU'RE CURRENTLY MAKING

**"Oftentimes one of the most difficult things about being a parent, a teacher or a caring adult is this nagging fear that maybe you're not making a difference. Listen to me: You have no idea the impact you're making right now."**

Josh Shipp

At the first loan signing 35 years ago, did the people at the table have any idea where the foundation would lead? That the decades following would see more than \$97.8 million distributed through our grantmaking and business finance programs.

When Josh Shipp spoke at the "Power of One" forum hosted earlier this year by Southwest Initiative Foundation, he encouraged caring adults to have hope in the future and not to judge in real time what history would prove over time. We rely on that mindset at the foundation. We think long-term with an unwavering, multi-generational commitment to the communities where we work. Achieving lasting outcomes spans generations.



One of the first ways Southwest Initiative Foundation made an impact in the region when it launched was through lending, which we still do today. Pictured is a loan closing from our early days.

We've been through tough times before. Challenges in our relationships, our economy and our communities may make us feel like what we have isn't enough and what we're doing won't take us where we want to go. Our 35th anniversary reminds us to be patient and dedicated in our work to unlock the potential that lives here.

Have hope. You may have no idea the impact you're currently making, but in another 35 years we'll look back and see how far we've come together.



# FREEZING TIME, *THAWING* CONNECTIONS

*In 2019, a group of four artists spent three days in Milan as part of a series of workshops in small towns across Minnesota. Artists Amanda Fredrickson, Meghan Grover, Amelia Hefferon and Sarah Meister met at grad school in New York and created The Defrost Project, using theater and storytelling to cultivate connection, explore local issues and celebrate rural communities.*



Galeasa Elias is a ninth grader at Lac qui Parle Valley High School and lives in Milan. The Defrost Project gave her a chance to be with her friends and work together.

With a grant from Milan Community Foundation – one of Southwest Initiative Foundation’s 30 affiliate partners – the artists returned this year to guide community members in exploring what it means to live in Milan, investigating what challenges Milan faces and imagining possible solutions.

“I think art gives us language and a way in [that] we don’t use every day. It opens up responses, questions, thoughts,” Sarah said, adding that it’s full of joy and play while also building critical thinking skills and helping us envision what isn’t already known.



Mauer (left) and Maci wait for a turn while artist Meghan Grover of The Defrost Project snaps photos.

The self-proclaimed Norwegian capital of the United States, Milan is a small town with a vibrant community fabric. Its Scandinavian roots are planted beside a community of newcomers from the Federated States of Micronesia who began arriving 20 years ago. Now half the town’s 428 residents are native Pacific Islanders or their children. Micronesia is a region between the Philippines and Hawaii that encompasses more than 2,000 islands. Milan’s Micronesians come from the island of Romanum in Chuuk State.

Galeasa Elias is a ninth grader at Lac qui Parle Valley High School. Born in Chuuk, she’s lived in Milan most her life. She likes going to the lake and swimming, going to the park and camping, playing volleyball. She feels connected to her native culture despite living an ocean away.

“There’s a lot of us out here in Milan. All my family members are here,” she said.

There are always gatherings and celebrations, with food as a centerpiece. Galeasa’s favorites are the Filipino dish pansit, which has chicken and vegetables, and musubi, meat with rice and seaweed.

*“Being with everyone and working on these projects was my favorite part.”*

**Galeasa Elias**

Being apart during the pandemic was hard for Galeasa, who was happy to come together with her friends for two weeks in August with The Defrost Project.

“I’m just happy to have everyone here and together, especially after the COVID stuff,” Galeasa said. “Being with everyone and working on these projects was my favorite part.”

What was meant to be a three-week project became a year of virtual programming due to the pandemic, with a finale in person. In August, Amanda, Meghan, Amelia and Sarah came to Milan to join with local organizations in hosting events, workshops and celebrations around town. They

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asked the kids what forms of art they found interesting, and many said architecture. The project focused on places that are important now and what spaces there could be in the future. There was movie night in the park, a special 4-H Summer Camp, an interactive play open to all ages called “Time Warp” and a celebration with a time capsule open house.

For the community time capsule, Galeasa brought a necklace that reminds her of her grandma, who passed away, and a flower that reminds her of the blooms in her tropical homeland. They lay on tables next to a quart of homemade pickles, a roll of toilet paper, cloth face masks, a swimsuit and more contributed by community members.

In the time capsule, kids recorded their hopes for the future. Some things they want to see change are bullying and racism and garbage in the park. In contrast, they hope the trees and nature, the people and volleyball matches can be found in the Milan of the future.

“We need to learn how to take care of people better,” said Galeasa, who also helped create a mural for the project that depicts the “sharks and islands” in life – what the kids feel afraid of, and the places they feel comfortable.



R-son (from left), Skenton, Skenson and J-one talk about their favorite places in Milan with artist Sarah Meister of The Defrost Project.

Ann Thompson grew up in Milan, in a house across the street from the park that’s still a social hub. The fourth generation of her family to call Milan home, Ann owns Billy Maple Tree’s Gift Shop downtown. She’s a local 4-H volunteer, an ESL teacher, board member of the Milan Community Foundation and head of the Greater Milan Initiative. Four years ago, the Greater Milan Initiative received a grant from Southwest Initiative Foundation to start a youth center for kids in grades 7 through 12. Ann is the adult guide and played a major role in The Defrost Project.

“I feel really lucky that I know a lot of the kids and they trust me,” Ann said. “Whatever I can do to help make kids’ lives better I will do it. If you’re an immigrant, there’s all these obstacles to navigate. These kids are navigating two cultures. They want to fit in, and they want to make their families happy. It can’t be easy.”

The Milan Youth Center and The Defrost Project came together for a two-day virtual spring break camp earlier this year. They talked a lot about COVID and the shutdown, about what it meant, what they were missing and what they were looking forward to when things opened up again. Then, the kids paired up and took photos of places where they liked or felt safe or relaxed. And they interviewed kids and adults around town about what it means to live in Milan, what they like and what they want to see change. The ideas and voices from the video fit together in a poem for the future, part of the project that froze time in this town, and thawed connections.

**“You should be proud of where you live. Living in a rural area doesn’t mean you’re settling for something less,” Ann said.**



Ann Thompson (right) and J-son are on their way to the time capsule open house in Milan as part of The Defrost Project.

**Check out our open Grow Our Own grant round at [swifoundation.org/grants](https://swifoundation.org/grants).**

Applications due by Dec. 6.

**MILAN YOUTH CENTER SPRING BREAK CAMP: MAKE A MOVIE TIME CAPSULE! (APRIL 2021)**

*“There’s always change,  
change happens.  
And through the imperfections,  
I hope you still see we love Milan how it is.  
I hope there’s going to be more people  
that care about each other and love each other.  
Milan feels like home  
when we’re all together.”*

**Grow Our Own Opportunity Grant funds Milan Youth Center**

In 2016, Southwest Initiative Foundation launched a 10-year commitment to “Grow Our Own,” closing the opportunity gap for our kids and their families. Shortly after, we opened a special Grow Our Own Opportunity Grant for our community foundation affiliates. In 2017, Milan Community Foundation and the Greater Milan Initiative Project applied for funding to start the Milan Youth Center. The Greater Milan Initiative was formed in 2007 and purchased the former Milan school building to create a community center.

“Since many of the youth living in and around Milan are living in two worlds, so to speak, they serve as excellent ‘bridges’ within our community, reaffirming Milan’s long history of support for education and families knowing that children are our future. We want to give them every possible opportunity to succeed,” said Ann Thompson, who leads the Greater Milan Initiative.

The project received a Grow Our Own Opportunity Grant and has since offered programs to enhance youth success in education and provide them with life enrichment activities. The Milan Youth Center was a major partner in The Defrost Project activities and continues to give our kids support and opportunities to reach their full potential.



# New network supports area employers, working families

*Five regional employers have partnered with Southwest Initiative Foundation to launch Minnesota's first Employer Resource Network®, an innovative approach to workforce development.*

Southwest Minnesota is experiencing a workforce shortage. Unemployment rates are between 3 and 4 percent for the areas this program serves, and the inability to recruit and retain employees is impacting our economy. At the same time, employees face barriers to finding career success and providing for themselves and their families.

ERNs are a solution to both: They assist companies in supporting working families while driving business growth. Southwest Initiative Foundation is using a model developed in Michigan in 2007 called Employer Resource Network® USA. This model combines job retention services, work supports, education and training. It assists employees in successfully navigating work and personal situations and employers in developing and retaining talent. ERNs also work with community service providers like social service agencies, workforce development groups, chambers of commerce, economic development groups and community and technical colleges or other training institutions.



## HOW IT WORKS

The Southwest Initiative Employer Resource Network® member companies include **Bethesda** – with locations in Willmar, Olivia and New London; **Minnesota Rubber & Plastics** and **Towmaster Trailers and Truck Equipment** located in Litchfield; **Jackpot Junction Casino & Hotel**, part of the Lower Sioux Indian Community; and **Jonti-Craft** in Wabasso.

Member companies pay for access to an on-site network Success Coach who works directly with employees as a coach, advocate and connector. Nationwide, member companies average a 500 percent return on their investment based on job turnover rates, the cost of skill building and training and increased productivity.

*The Success Coach assists with a wide range of challenges and opportunities—both work-related and personal, which can include:*

- Accessing child care
- Dealing with financial pressures
- Budgeting, banking or building a credit score
- Affordable housing options
- Transportation and car repairs
- Applying for other programs
- Locating counseling
- Managing conflicts with family/co-workers
- Training, education or career advancement

Together, the Success Coach and employees set goals, access resources and explore supports that will help them excel at work and beyond.

## A PERFECT MATCH FOR GROW OUR OWN

ERNs match both short- and long-term economic development strategies for our communities, businesses, families and kids—from cradle to career. The model is a great fit for Grow Our Own, our work to ensure that all southwest Minnesota kids can access the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

We know that one of the things kids need to succeed is stable families and parenting. Through ERNs, workers gain economic self-sufficiency and build wealth for themselves and their families. They also can access the supports they need to provide safe, nurturing environments for the kids in their lives.

Career on-ramps are another key to our kids' success. ERNs help our southwest Minnesota employers develop and retain talent, ensuring we'll continue to have strong regional businesses as young people prepare for and enter the workforce.

## MEET OUR SUCCESS COACH



Jean Spaulding

Jean Spaulding is an employee of Southwest Initiative Foundation and spends her time on-site with our current Southwest Initiative Employer Resource Network® member companies. Jean meets with employees in this newly launched network to identify issues they're facing and make a personal connection to resources and assistance to help them excel at work and at home. She also builds relationships with supporting community organizations and service providers.

"I'm so excited to be able to work with businesses through this new and innovative partnership. I feel anyone can benefit from having a coach to help make sense of whatever is going on or just bounce ideas off when needed. When a person comes across a new situation, you don't always know where to turn and having an available resource – one text away – can make a big difference," Jean said. "I feel that everything I've done throughout my career has brought me to this place, and I'm passionate about being part of the small hinge that can help swing a big door in someone's life."

There are thousands of people, businesses and organizations that give *THROUGH* us—to a community foundation, donor-advised fund, or another local fund. Then, there are those who give *TO* us. Those who support our mission to connect people, invest in ideas and build communities. Our work is not possible without the partners listed below, and we are grateful for their support during our Fiscal Year 2021.

Southwest Initiative Foundation General Endowment

Our general endowment fund is a cornerstone of who we are and what we can accomplish together, through the power of collective generosity. We have been building it for 35 years to provide dependent, perpetual income that makes our work possible year after year, regardless of challenging times we may face.

10 Anonymous Gifts John and Diana Anderson In Memory of: Marian Adamek, Sonia Grasmon, Greg Jodzio, Jim Michels Gary Agren Sandy Agustin In Honor of: Striving towards equity All Family Chiropractic Dr. Ivy N. Allard In Memory of: June Lynne AmazonSmile Barry and Kathy Anderson Charlie Anderson In Memory of: Glenn Anderson Garrett and Krista Anderson Garrett and Krista Anderson In Memory of: Greg Jodzio Jean E. Anderson Lori Anderson Ron Anderson Holli and Rob Arp Ruth Ascher Robert Aufenthie Cheryl Avenel-Navara Aveyron Homes Steve and Phyllis Bailey Doug and Sharon Bakker Balaton Construction, Inc. Perry and Marquita Banks Terri and Kent Bargfrede John and Cathy Baumgartner Patrick and Katie Baustian Mike and Jean Belinsky Berny and James Berger Dr. Thomas G. Birkey and Doris R. Thompson Pastor Albert Bodaski Rhonda Bonnstetter Greg and Carol Bossuyt Gene Bottin Shirley Bowen Brian G. 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Hansen Andrea Hanson Anthony and Kristi Hanson	Robert and Christie Hantge Robert and Christie Hantge In Memory of: Greg Jodzio Earl and Eileen Harff In Memory of: Craig Miller Joyce Harguth In Memory of: Wayne Harguth Kim and Carol Haukos Marilee Haukos In Honor of: Hunter, Nathan and Carter Jeff and Anne Heerdt In Memory of: Marilyn Heerdt Keith and Lois Hein James and Lindsay Heinecke Tom and Cheryl Hoff Daniel and Donna Hoffman Paul Holzemer In Memory of: Father Robert P. Goblirsch Virginia Homme Dan and Theresa Honsey HP, Inc. On Behalf of: Jeffrey Ohlmann Kathryn Hund Cynthia Huse Hutchinson Public Arts Commission members Justin Beck, Morgan Baum, Brandon Begnaud, Steve Cook, Jackie Fuchs, Patrick Hiltner, Dan Jochum, and Kay Voigt In Memory of: Greg Jodzio Daniel Jarner Penny Jaskowiak In Honor of: Michael and Samantha Mahon Joanie's Catering, LLC In Memory of: Greg Jodzio Kent and Donna Johansen Barbara J. 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# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

Fiscal Year 2021

CONNECT  
Fall/Winter 2021

## THANKS TO YOU, THIS YEAR WE...

**Awarded 1,181 grants totaling \$7,479,496**  
from all our funds to nonprofits and  
communities in our region

**Closed 44 new loans totaling \$1,421,884** to  
support businesses in southwest Minnesota

Read our entire annual impact report  
online at [swifoundation.org/2021impact](https://swifoundation.org/2021impact)



**Clockwise from top:**

Hsa Mu, Karen Parent Student Connector at Marshall Public Schools, Hteh Rue, co-owner of Chaw's Asian Market in Willmar and a graduate of Elevate Community Business Academy, John Davidson (right) with friends Virgil and Barb Vanstrom, attending an Age Well Live Wisely gathering in Canby, Luverne Elementary School Counselor Marie Atkinson-Smeins, student Georgia and therapy dog Ally

## Growing Home Circle

Our Growing Home Circle members are critical partners in bringing our mission to life. The Growing Home Circle is a way to recognize visionary donors elevating their annual support, and these members supported SWIF with a gift of \$1,000 or more. These gifts position us to do more and be better.

John and Diana Anderson  
Tiffany and Blake Barnard  
Family  
Tom and Sue Brakke  
Thomas "Buzz" Burich  
Carr Family Foundation  
Catholic Area Faith  
Community of Jesus Our  
Living Water  
Matt and Liz Cheney  
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Hutchinson, Inc.  
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Dammermann  
Robert and Patti Dols  
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Memory of: Greg Jodzio  
Nancy and Marc Fasching  
Federated Rural Electric  
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Frank J. Zaher Charitable  
Trust  
Dr. Wayne and Karen Freese  
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Glen and Jacqueline  
Herfurth  
Jennie-O Turkey Store, Inc.  
Greg and Betty Jodzio  
K.A.H.R. Foundation  
Mike and Rhonda Kramer  
Vincent and Anne LaPorte

Dan and Marie LaRock  
Lathrop GPM  
Mark Lofthus and  
Marian Blattner  
Dave and Marlyce Logan and  
Grandchildren:  
Audrey Burger,  
Lucile Burger,  
Samuel Griebel,  
Scott Griebel,  
Jack Thomas and  
Molly Thomas  
Sander and Peggy Ludeman  
Janet Lundebrek  
Debra McCormick  
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Foundation  
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SWIF Board of Directors In  
Honor of: SWIF staff  
Bob and Tami Taubert  
Morgan, Mara, Marli and  
Max Taubert  
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Thomas and Mari Torgerson  
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Beth Westra  
William D. and Joyce E.  
Sexton Family Foundation  
Mark and Amy Woitalewicz

## CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF OUR COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND

**Greg Jodzio** was with SWIF nearly 11 years - 10 years, 10 months and 10 days to be exact; you could say he was a perfect 10. Greg was fond of telling people that it was hotdogs that brought him to the foundation. He got to know us as a microloan client when he started Red's Hot, the legendary hotdog stand in Hutchinson. He then joined our business finance team, working with entrepreneurs for over 5 years and then moving to fundraising for about 5 years. Greg loved sharing the SWIF story of innovation, collaboration and the positive impact people are making together across southwest Minnesota.

Diagnosed with an aggressive form of lung cancer last fall, Greg approached his journey with positivity, heart and courage. Greg left this earth Sunday, April 11. In his final days, Greg reminded us that he lived a good life and enjoyed it to the fullest. He asked us not to be sad but to keep on doing our good work and having fun doing it. And so we will, but it will be less fun without him. Our team will remember Greg for his smiles, jokes, caring ways and good-natured personality.



**Greg Jodzio**  
Oct. 8, 1947- April 11, 2021



## SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE FOUNDATION

15 3rd Avenue NW  
Hutchinson, MN 55350

## NEW BOARD MEMBER WELCOME



**Erica Volkir** of Pipestone and **Benjamin Wilcox** of Benson have been elected to our board of directors. Erica is the executive director of the Pipestone Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism. Ben is an attorney in his hometown of Benson, working with his father at Wilcox Law Office. We're excited to welcome these new members and at the same time extend our deepest thanks to retiring board members Janice Nelson of Montevideo, who served 12 years, and Mark Titus of Jackson, who served 6 years.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### *Chair*

Patricia Dols

### *Vice Chair*

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Terry Gaalswyk, PhD

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Jenelle Stiras

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Jeffrey Vetsch

Amy Woitalewicz

Marie Zimmerman

### *Lead for America Fellow*

Ricky Mojekwu

*Comments or change of address? Contact us!*

Email us at [info@swifoundation.org](mailto:info@swifoundation.org) or call 800-594-9480.

15 3rd Avenue NW | Hutchinson, MN 55350 | [www.swifoundation.org](http://www.swifoundation.org)

(320) 587-4848 (local)

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