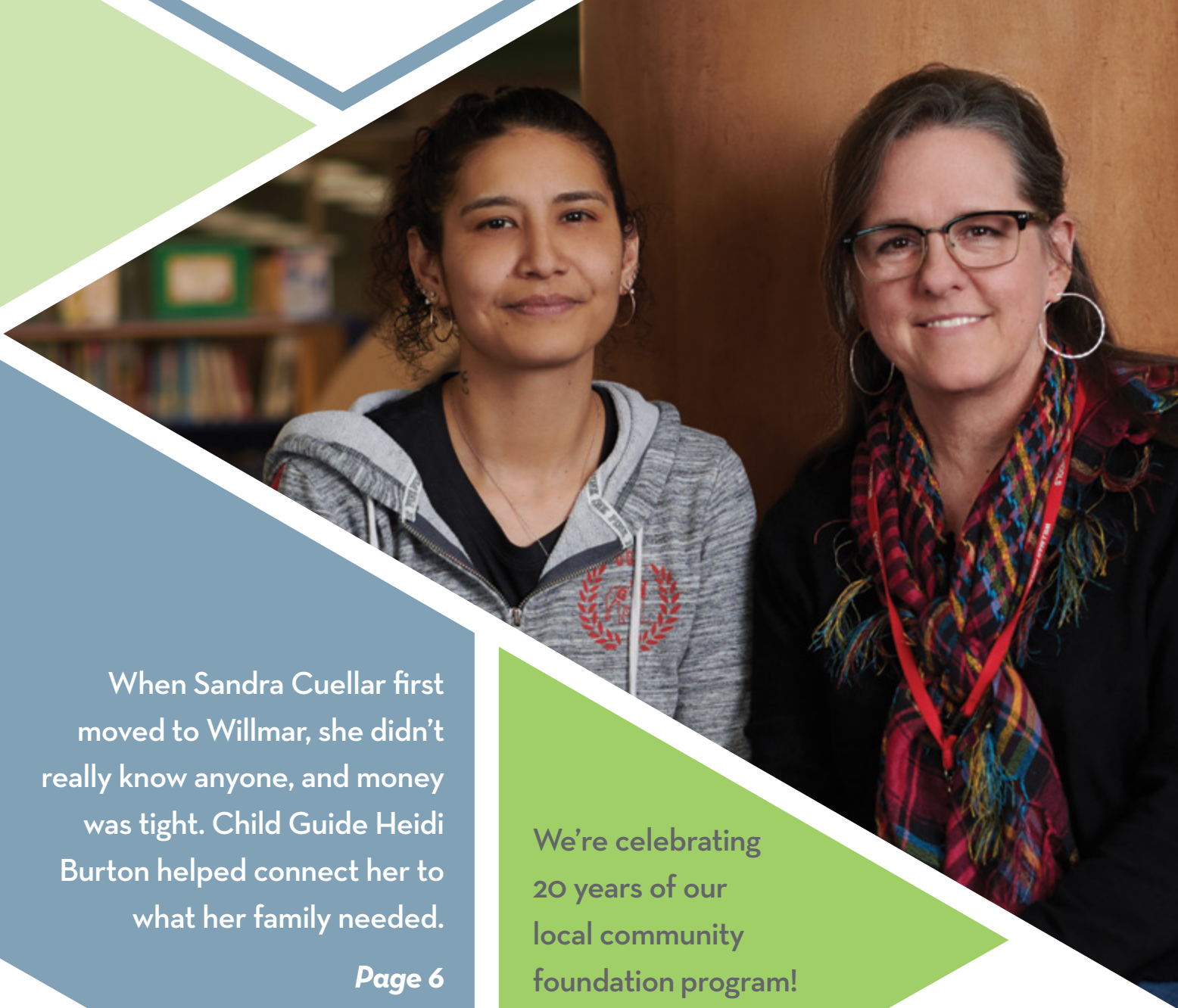


CONNECT

Fall/Winter 2019



When Sandra Cuellar first moved to Willmar, she didn't really know anyone, and money was tight. Child Guide Heidi Burton helped connect her to what her family needed.

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We're celebrating 20 years of our local community foundation program!

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SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE
FOUNDATION

GENERATION TO GENERATION

President/CEO Diana Anderson

The opportunity to work with communities through a local foundation model was one of the things that drew me to working at Southwest Initiative Foundation 18+ years ago. My early days were spent crisscrossing the region to facilitate meetings, provide trainings and attend local events to build relationships.

I feel so inspired to see many of the original volunteers remain engaged and committed today. And, I'm equally inspired by the new partners joining the work. We're excited to welcome Cottonwood and Glencoe as our two new affiliates, bringing our total to 28 local community foundations!

For us, it's about retaining local wealth from one generation to the next. It's also about creating a network of people across the region who are connected in their communities as well as to the larger work of Southwest Initiative Foundation.

For me personally, this work is more critical than ever as I feel our generations shift. In July, I lost my dad. It's been harder than I could've imagined. Wilbur Hintz was an incredibly patient man remembered for his work ethic, integrity, compassion, humor and servant heart. He loved my mom's spunk and spark and he pinned his hopes on me – his only daughter. He made me believe that I could accomplish anything I set out to do. I was always grateful, but only in the past few years

have I come to realize the full impact of his vision for my future at a time when society wasn't as encouraging of young girls to pursue their dreams.

I feel that same spirit in Southwest Initiative Foundation's vision for a southwest Minnesota where all people thrive. We're beginning our next phase of what we call Grow Our Own, a plan to ensure our next generation has the chance to succeed. Moving forward, you won't see a major change in our work. We'll continue promoting, supporting and leading efforts connected to five areas kids need to succeed: stable families and parenting, high quality early childhood care and education, engagement in the K-12 years in and out of school, career on-ramps and welcoming and vibrant communities.

The main belief driving Southwest Initiative Foundation's work over the past three years is that *all* kids in a community are *our* kids, and that every single person in the community has a role to play in giving them the best start to life. Our future depends on them.



Diana helped her dad, Wilbur, celebrate his 90th birthday last year. Wilbur was one of those people who in their own, often quiet way, are supporting our kids.

My dad was one of those people who in his own, often quiet way, supported our kids. He employed high school kids on the farm during



Wilbur Hintz

the summer and treated them like family. In a note of sympathy, one of them wrote, "Wilbur's passing marks a watershed moment in my own life as he was one of the very few people for whom I had the utmost respect and love. To say he had a positive influence on my life's journey would be an understatement. I will always remember his sense of humor, his patience (and I demanded a LOT of patience when it came to farming), and his love of life."

I often told family and friends that dad was an everyday hero, the kind whose admiration and respect aren't earned through courageous acts on the battlefield, but through quiet acts of kindness and service to others.

I challenge each of you – whether you're a parent, grandparent, employer, educator, elected official, community member – to find ways to be everyday heroes, especially to the kids who need them most.

This is the greatest legacy we can leave for our families, friends and communities, but it takes our action today!

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF LOCAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

In 1999, Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) piloted a local community foundation program to give southwest Minnesotans a way to support the charities, and the places, that were important in their lives, and to retain wealth in this rural region. This idea of giving and grantmaking is at the core of traditional community foundations, but it was a bold new experiment for SWIF, which had established a reputation as an economic development leader.

As an incentive for communities to try this new idea, SWIF offered grants for strategic planning, to help create visibility and local interest in the foundation and to match initial gifts. Four communities signed on during the pilot – Dawson, Appleton, Pipestone and Worthington.

Local Community Foundation Partners by the Numbers

28 local
community
foundation
partners

advising
108
funds (including endowment, operating,
project and designated funds) with assets totaling

\$9.2 million

awarding
2,418
grants totaling
\$6.6 million in
the last 20 years

In the early days, SWIF offered communities administrative support including gift processing and receipting, grant processing, investment management and the 501(c)(3) status necessary for donors to receive the highest possible charitable tax deduction.

“It started with a focus on funding and gifts, but quickly grew into helping communities think about their shared values, how they wanted to reinvest,” said Diana Anderson, who managed the pilot as Director of Fund Development and is now the foundation’s President and CEO. “We didn’t treat it as a transactional relationship. We wove in capacity building and leadership development as we saw the work bringing life to our mission at the local level.”

Kevin Paulsen was a founding advisory board

member of Pipestone Area Community Foundation and recalls how the investment of SWIF’s energy and resources elevated local leadership.

“SWIF helped not only with the administration of our funds and making sure that we were doing everything legally and correctly, but they also really helped us develop and grow into what we’ve become over the years. Their guidance was invaluable,” Kevin said.

Based on feedback from the pilot partners, it was clear this program offered a valuable service for donors and communities alike. In March 2001, the board approved community foundations as a permanent program.

Later, Liz Cheney took over for Diana in guiding communities through the process of getting started and maintaining momentum as SWIF Program Officer.

“I had the honor of meeting and helping wonderful people who really wanted to make their communities even better places to live,” Liz shared. “Their work was visionary, and it was hard. But they brought heart and passion to it, and that made all the difference.”

Today, Liz is the Director of Philanthropy, and Jeff

Vetsch serves our community foundation partners as Community Philanthropy Officer.

“The work of community foundations is about giving. Giving out grants yes, but also giving donors a meaningful place to express their generosity,” Jeff said, adding the value of community foundations isn’t only in dollars and cents, but also in strengthening the social fabric.

With two additions in 2019 – Cottonwood and Glencoe – SWIF currently has 28 community foundation partners across southwest Minnesota.

The program has been adaptable to each community’s specific needs and wants, while supporting a stronger region as a whole.

“I think our rural communities are part of an ecosystem. When one of our communities does well, there’s a spillover effect. This idea of collaboration is more important than ever,” Diana said.

To celebrate 20 years of supporting local community foundations in southwest Minnesota, we’ve highlighted the four pilot community foundations.



Southwest Initiative Foundation piloted a local community foundation program in 1999, and 20 years later works with 28 community foundation partners. Developing local leaders through volunteer board service is one aspect of the partnership, and SWIF continues to host events like this training for volunteers from our family of funds.

Turn the page
to read more.



COMMUNITY *builders*



This collection of photos celebrates our four pilot community foundation partners around the region.

1. Dawson's gnomes are a whimsical tribute to the local volunteer spirit.
2. Jeff Vetsch meets with members of the Pipestone Area Community Foundation board.
3. Appleton Aquatic Center, *Photo credit: Get Rural MN.*
4. Harmon Park, the crown jewel of Pipestone's city parks.
5. The "Time to Share" program receives support from the Worthington Area Foundation.
6. Volunteers erect playground equipment, *Photo credit: Appleton Press.*
7. Bob Demuth (left) congratulates a Worthington Area Foundation grantee.
8. Riverview Park Playground in Appleton, *Photo credit: Get Rural MN.*
9. Jeff Vetsch meets with the Dawson Community Foundation Board.



APPLETON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Pooling resources in Appleton



Appleton Community Foundation played an important role in renovating the Appleton Aquatic Center for the whole community to enjoy. Now the pool has space for lap swim and swimming lessons, a deep end with dual-drop slide and diving board and a zero-entry pool that caters to the smallest swimmers.

Photo credit: Appleton Press

Funds from the 1996 sale of the Prairie Correctional Facility in Appleton sparked the idea for a community foundation in this town of about 1,400. The Appleton Project managed the profits from the sale of the prison and made the lead gift to launch the Appleton Community Foundation (ACF).

“Every community needs those players in town who can help with community and school projects, and a lot of times that’s the role of the local community foundations,” said Jim Massee, who was on the founding board of The Appleton Project.

ACF has focused on serving as a permanent local catalyst, stimulating growth and the enrichment of the people of Appleton by inspiring leadership, hope, generosity, and the spirit of unity.

“People here genuinely care. They are close knit and anytime there’s something going on there are people here to help you,” said Leslie Ehrenberg, a long-time ACF advisory board member.

Becoming the fiscal host for the new Appleton Aquatic Center was one of the most ambitious projects ACF took on. There was a mysterious leak in the pool that kept draining all the water, and the price tag to update it was nearly \$1 million. Leslie recruited volunteers to form the Appleton Swimming Pool Committee, which dove right in to fundraising and opened a project fund through ACF that grew to \$312,000.

Andrew Schmidt grew up in Appleton, went away to college and moved back to raise a family. He’s the current treasurer for ACF and has served four years on the advisory board. Andrew is always impressed by the level of support people continue to provide for the local community foundation whenever there’s a fundraiser.

“We’ve been around now for quite a while and everybody kind of knows about us,” Andrew said. “It’s a very fun board to be on because you’re giving money to lots of different causes.”

DAWSON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Community spirit of service in Dawson

Colorful gnomes line the roadside leading into Dawson, a whimsical tribute to the local volunteer spirit. Each year during the town’s Riverfest Celebration, gnomes are revealed in the likeness of a citizen or group of citizens who have served the community. The legend of the gnomes states that in Dawson, “People from the country and town work together to make good things happen.”

There was just such a gathering in 1990. Area residents took part in a comprehensive, long-term community self-renewal program called “Project Future” facilitated by the University of Minnesota Extension.

Loren Femrite, Dawson’s resident gnome-maker for past the 20 years or so, was part of those conversations.

“A big group came to brainstorm ideas to promote Dawson and make changes. One was to start a foundation,” Loren said.

Dr. Phil Maus and the late Gerry Michaelson of Dawson both served on the SWIF Board of Directors at different times and connected Dawson to the pilot program for local community foundations.



Loren Femrite has been Dawson’s resident gnome-maker for the past 20 years or so and was part of the founding board of the Dawson Community Foundation.

Its original mission still guides the Dawson Community Foundation today: to connect the needs of the community to the passion of donors with the goal of enhancing community resources and spirit.

Since its founding, DCF has granted \$276,871 to a wide variety of community projects – children’s theater, high school robotics, senior nutrition meals, hanging flower baskets.

“I like to see the money used for the benefit of so many people. Every one of those organizations are so appreciative,” said board member Sharilyn Bates. “You give a little, and you get a lot back.”

And of course, there are grants for the Riverfest Gnomes. The gnome honorees exemplify the spirit of Dawson – exerting a positive influence on the growth and well-being of the community as a whole, as well as each individual member.

PIPESTONE AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Pipestone Area Community Foundation board members accept a donation from First Bank & Trust to the fund to build a new concession stand and restrooms for the baseball fields at Westview Park. Pictured are Gavin Winter (from left), PACF board member; Kevin Paulsen, president of First Bank & Trust in Pipestone; and PACF board members Blake Klinsing, Linda Erickson and Ian Cunningham. *Photo credit: Pipestone County Star*

A passion for projects in Pipestone

Kevin Paulsen remembers sitting down at one of the first meetings to organize what would become the Pipestone Area Community Foundation: “It was just a group of local citizens who were looking for a way to help those who wanted to give back to the community.”

It was 1999, and these citizens were focused on the new Pipestone Area Schools building. It had taken three attempts to pass the local school bonding bill, and amenities for the building were scaled back to lower the cost. Kevin and the rest of the founding board of Pipestone Area Educational Enrichment Foundation – its original name – raised money to make sure local students would still get a top-notch learning environment.

“As a result of timing and bidding, they were able to put a lot of those amenities into the building, so a lot of funds we raised ended up going to purchasing supplies for the new school such as choir robes, whiteboards, band instruments and art supplies,” said Kevin, who was on the PACF advisory board for 15 years, is a lifelong community member and serves as Community Bank President at First Bank and Trust in Pipestone.

Since the beginning, PACF has focused on projects to benefit the community and, over 20 years, has granted \$667,002 locally. That includes the major investment in revitalizing Harmon Park.

Located at the intersection of three highways, Harmon Park is the largest park in town and home to the Family Aquatic Center; courts for tennis, basketball and volleyball; picnic shelters; and a softball diamond. It was in disrepair when PACF started fundraising and granted more than \$226,000 to bring it back to life as a gathering place to be enjoyed by residents and visitors.

“Your community is what you make it,” said current PACF board member Jody Wacker.

WORTHINGTON AREA FOUNDATION

Retaining wealth for Worthington

Opportunity knocked on Mayor Robert J. Demuth’s office door in 1990. Bob, who is now 92 and has lived in Worthington for 62 years, recalls the event that inspired the Worthington Area Foundation.

“I was in my office one day and somebody came in and said they’d like to give \$50,000 to a foundation. I didn’t even know what a foundation was,” Bob said.

While that original gift didn’t come through, it lit the fire in Bob to learn more, and the Worthington Area Foundation (WAF) started in 1991.

WAF is a permanent resource for the community that provides leadership and financial resources to meet community needs.

It connects donors to options like named charitable funds that are permanently endowed and restricted for a specific purpose. These designated funds can be a wonderful way to leave a legacy, like the late Ron and Dorothy Nasers chose to do. Nasers created several designated funds under the umbrella of WAF, including

one to benefit Manna Food Pantry, Inc. and another for the YMCA of Worthington.

Over the last 20 years, WAF has focused on building a legacy through its endowment and advised funds, which total more than \$440,000 today. These assets allow the foundation to grow its grants throughout the community.

Current board member Sharon Johnson highlighted the International Festival as a uniquely Worthington event WAF has supported with grants totaling \$7,850 over several years. The festival promotes the acceptance of individual differences and fosters positive relationships among groups with folk and traditional artist performances, immigrant panel discussions, food vendors, artisan booths, ethnic cultural education booths and activities for children.

“One of the things I love about Worthington is the welcoming spirit of the people in our community. We’re a very diverse community and we have worked at being very inclusive and taking pride in our diversity and viewing it as an asset,” Sharon said.



Worthington Area Foundation supports a variety of projects and activities that help create a vibrant and welcoming community, including the Worthington International Festival. *Photo Credit: Jose Lamas on behalf of the Worthington International Festival*

Twenty years is a lot of history to fit on a few pages! Visit swifoundation.org/stories to read more about our partners.

Willmar Child Guide Heidi Burton (second from left) has been a link for many students and families, including siblings Alisae Dillard (from left), Israel Cuellar, Alyssa Dillard, Yasmi Dillard (seated) and Estrella Cuellar, and their mom, Sandra Cuellar (second from right).



Child Guide

LINKS FAMILIES TO WHAT THEY NEED

Sandra Cuellar is an amazing mom who's given everything she has to support her kids. But sometimes, everything she has hasn't been enough.

When Sandra first moved to Willmar, she didn't really know anyone, and money was tight. She focused on supporting her kids as they navigated new schools, new friends and peer pressure.

"The biggest challenge was wanting to join a program but my mom wasn't able to afford it," said Yasmi Dillard, Sandra's daughter.

Heidi Burton helped them find a way. She's a Child Guide at Roosevelt Elementary School in Willmar.

"Heidi would always say, 'If the girls need anything, send them to me,'" Sandra remembers.

"Anything" included school supplies, day camps, mentorships, theater camp, Girl Scouts, skating lessons and more for Sandra's six kids.

"Every time I'd pass by Heidi's room, I'd stop to talk to her," said Estrella Cuellar, the youngest of

Sandra's girls.

Willmar was the first southwest Minnesota community to pilot the Guide Program in 1996 with the help of Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF). Child Guide is based on research done by Search Institute identifying 40 developmental assets children need to grow into capable, caring and resilient adults. Studies show the fewer assets a child has, the more likely the child will be involved in unhealthy, risky behaviors.

In its first two years, Willmar's Child Guide program yielded extraordinary results, and several other southwest Minnesota communities added Child Guides. While they are housed in schools, Child Guides are completely funded by grants and donations. SWIF and its partner funds, including local community foundation partners, have granted Child Guide programs more than \$990,000 over the last 20 years.

"Part of what kids need to be successful in life is for their parents to be supported," said Nancy Fasching, SWIF's Community Impact Director. "Child Guide is a great way to link families to resources for their immediate needs."

Through the work of Grow Our Own, a cradle-to-career approach to closing the opportunity gap facing kids living in poverty, the foundation is also focusing on long-term strategies that give kids and families in the region a stable foundation to build on for the future.

In the Willmar School District, each elementary school has a Child Guide who links kids and volunteers, kids and activities and kids and resources, ensuring all children have what they need for healthy growth.

Heidi has been doing this work for 18 years. Last year, the Willmar Child Guides worked with nearly 500 students. Since 1996, the Child Guide program has connected kids to thousands of activities and resources that answer their academic, social, and basic needs.

"We can work with any student in the school. It just happens naturally that a lot of our students are dealing with financial issues or cultural issues. We just have a lot of really neat kids and an awesome diversity at our school," Heidi said.

In Sandra's family, Heidi has guided each of the kids, some of whom are now adults. Sandra covered a wall in her home with photos of the kids and their achievements and keeps adding to it. Yasmi, who falls in the middle of the siblings, is a high schooler and is taking college classes for phlebotomy and certified nursing assistant (CNA) through Ridgewater College in Willmar.

"I just really enjoy helping people and always wanted to do that," Yasmi said. "It's important to support Child Guide so more families can be involved."

Israel, the youngest, transferred to Kennedy Elementary School in Willmar and has Child Guide Leah Thorpe to turn to now. She linked him to a youth soccer team last year, and it's hard to tear him away from kicking the ball in the backyard. Israel says it's important to support the Child Guide program "to help kids with their problems."

"We love kids, and we're here working on their behalf. It's a great job," Heidi said. "Every community should have child guides. We are really blessed to have this program here and we just keep working to make sure it's still here."

What can your community do to support kids? Email info@swifoundation.org if you would like assistance starting or continuing a Grow Our Own conversation in your community.



The Child Guide model has also proved a great fit for the community of Luverne. Find an update on that program at swifoundation.org/child-guide.



SWIF Entrepreneurship Finance Specialist Selina Berning (right) stops by the salon to visit Nancy and see how her business is doing.

It was scary for Nancy Beck to open her own business, but her dreams proved bigger than her fears. After Nancy graduated from Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Pipestone, she worked as a nail tech in Marshall.

“When I started as a nail tech, I immediately fell in love with the job,” Nancy said. “I love talking.”

While she was creating nail designs, Nancy would dream about how she’d set up her own salon if she had the chance. In 2015, with help from Southwest Initiative Foundation’s (SWIF) Microenterprise Loan Program, she swallowed her fears and opened the doors to Polish Nail Lounge in a small space in downtown Marshall with one part-time employee. Now she has five full-time staff and another part-time employee, plus a new location near the college.

“We’ve gotten overwhelming support from the community of Marshall,” Nancy said.

Polish offers waxing and eyelash extensions in addition to nail services. Nancy and her sister, Keo Rasmussen, recently added a clothing line, too.

Keo works a few hours on the salon floor in addition to her full-time job at U.S. Bank, and she manages the bookwork for Polish. Keo has taken advantage of the technical assistance offered by SWIF to improve her business management skills.

All microloan clients have access to free QuickBooks training, management and marketing assistance and other training opportunities for the life of the loan.

“A loan from SWIF isn’t just a transaction,” said SWIF Entrepreneurship Finance Specialist Selina Berning. “We build relationships and try to understand what each business needs to succeed. Businesses are an important part of what makes our communities in southwest Minnesota vibrant.”

Among the ups and downs of running her own business, “finding good employees is probably the most challenging part,” Nancy said. “It’s hard, and keeping everyone happy is hard too. It’s not always rainbows and sunshine.”

But that initial fear of opening up shop has subsided. With the end of her loan payments in sight and four years as a business owner under her belt, Nancy envisions having a few more locations in surrounding towns and, eventually, working less. That will give her more time to be with her husband and her 4-year-old daughter. She also has a stepson who lives in Texas.

“We’ve made it,” Nancy said. “Or we’re almost there.”



Thinking about starting your own business but not sure how to take the first step?

Visit swifoundation.org/start to find out more about our business development programs and how we can help with your project.



SOUTHWEST INITIATIVE FOUNDATION

15 3rd Avenue NW
Hutchinson, MN 55350

NEW BOARD MEMBER WELCOME



Daniel Greve was recently elected to our board of directors. Dan grew up in Worthington and has spent much of his career there. As a business executive for the past 20 years, Dan brings expertise in finance, human resources, governance and general operations. He also believes strongly in the

work of Grow Our Own. Dan is currently COO and CFO at Prairie Holdings Group. We're excited to welcome Dan, and at the same time extend our deepest thanks to Robert Thurston and Mary Maertens as they retire from the board. [Read Bob and Mary's full board tributes at swifoundation.org/stories.](http://swifoundation.org/stories)

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