Investing in Change

Fall 2019 Newsletter

COVER STORY
Women Helping Women & Girls

Teen participants at the Running & Winning Workshop, League of Women Voters of Westchester
It was a single statistic that caught their attention. Pat Larson and Rita Gilbert were attending a conference for community foundations in the early 1990s. It was at a breakout session that they heard about a fund another community foundation had started for women and girls. “We couldn’t believe that only a tiny percentage of the total philanthropy in the country at the time was going to support women and girls,” recalls Larson, executive director.

At the next board meeting Pat and Rita, board chair, proposed creating a fund for women and girls. When it became clear the men on the board didn’t understand the need for such a fund, long-time member Vito Russo broke the stalemate. “I’ll make the first donation,” he said. “I never had children of my own, but my wife and stepdaughters are very dear to me.”

Gaining support. A dedicated group of women, representing Westchester County’s racial, ethnic, cultural, and geographic diversity, developed an ambitious plan to educate themselves and the community about the needs of local women and girls. Members of the newly formed group decided to create a permanently endowed fund and to call it the Westchester Fund for Women and Girls. It was 1992, and they weren’t sure if other women would support it. But support it they did – and so did a few enlightened men. By 1996 the Fund was making grants.

Lasting impact. The Fund’s annual signature breakfast attracted hundreds, honored women leaders, and raised significant funds from individuals, area corporations, and organizations. Speakers included First Lady Hillary Clinton (1999), Brandeis University law professor Anita F. Hill (2000), and tennis legend Billie Jean King (2005). By 1999, the women had reached their initial goal of $500,000, representing $1 for every female in the County. They raised the bar and met their new goal of $2 million by 2005. Today this permanently endowed fund is worth $2.5 million. The Fund will award $92,000 in grants this year to support local nonprofits that are making a difference in the lives of women and girls. Annual grant awards will be possible in perpetuity.
A Permanent Fund for Women and Girls

Help the Moms, Help the Family

Early grants from the Westchester Fund for Women and Girls focused on supporting agencies that subsidized child care for the children of working moms and taught parenting skills. It also provided leadership opportunities and scholarships for young women with low incomes and supportive services for homeless women. Significant funding was given to reduce domestic violence, sexual assault, and dating violence, and to provide legal and social supports to survivors and their children.

In recent years the Fund has supported programs for low-income women struggling to overcome multiple challenges. Family Services of Westchester provides a parenting program called EMERGE for incarcerated mothers at the county corrections facility. At a recent graduation each woman shared her “Fire Story” – a time in her life when she “walked through fire” and came out the other side.

In June, the Mary J. Blige Center for Women and Girls at Westchester Jewish Community Services held its annual Recognition and Achievement Ceremony for 17 women, many of whom are single moms. The Academic and Career Support Program helped prepare them to pass their high school equivalency exam and master essential job skills. Mishelin Pichardo, an alumnae, earned her Associate’s degree from Westchester Community College in June and will attend Lehman College in the spring. A single mom, Mishelin is the case manager at the Center. Every day she leads by example, proof that what might seem impossible at the start really is possible with support and determination.

From 1992-2018 the Westchester Fund for Women and Girls has grown through sound investment while making an impact.

Total Gifts

$2 Million

Market Value

$2.5 Million

Grants

147 grants totaling $1.5 Million

Where you can combine your passions and generosity for lasting impact.
Henriette Granville Suhr: She cared about the environment.

Henriette and William Suhr were self-taught gardeners, yet over the course of 50 years they turned Rocky Hills, their 15-acre weekend retreat in New Castle, into an award-winning gardener’s delight. She was an interior designer; he was an art conservator. Both had an eye for design, texture, and color, filling the grounds with rhododendrons, peonies, azaleas, tulips, daffodils, and roses. They learned mostly by trial-and-error, fearlessly moving trees and plants when they became too big for their space or to make room for new plantings.

For the public. Although widowed by 1984, Henriette continued to garden into her 90s, welcoming the public to her oasis during the Garden Conservancy’s Open Days. The garden remains a popular staple on the Open Days calendar.

Her legacy. After Henriette’s death in 2015, the William and Henriette Granville Suhr Fund for the Environment – a permanent fund – was established at the Westchester Community Foundation to support causes she cared about. The Fund underwrote a youth horticulture program at Untermyer Park and Gardens in Yonkers. Student interns from Yonkers public schools spent their summer restoring an historic rhododendron garden.

WHAT DO YOU CARE ABOUT?

To set up a permanent fund that will support your favorite cause, in perpetuity, call Laura Rossi or Donna Banks at 914-948-5166.