

# Carrying on Carmichael's legacy

□ *Rochelle Area Community Foundation grows by leaps and bounds over past 10 years*

BY LORI TEPINSKI  
Staff Writer

MORE than a decade ago a small group of committed citizens gathered under the guidance of Leonard Carmichael to form the Rochelle Area Community Foundation. Carmichael's vision for a lasting charitable foundation has evolved into an organization that supports a large number of local non-profit agency programs and services, and this month marks the 10-year anniversary of the foundation's not-for-profit status.

Since its inception, the foundation has grown to provide a large investment in education, hunger relief, health and wellness, community services and arts and culture in Rochelle, Creston, Kings, Lindenwood, Esmond, and Steward. The foundation serves by receiving and investing principal gift funds to provide annual grants for non-profit agencies in the greater Rochelle region with interest earned each year.

Executive director Kim Montgomery explained grants are awarded for specific projects and programs through an application process.

"Currently that time is in the spring with applications due during the month of February," Montgomery said. "We review applications in March and make awards in late April. The number of grants we give out has increased as the foundation grows."

## Requests

In 2015 the Foundation received more than 40 applications requesting more than \$100,000 in grants. Of those, 36 were fully or partially funded.

The tornado that hit the Rochelle area in April of 2015 resulted in an outpouring of financial support from local residents and people all over the country. RACF board members, along with local banks and the fire department provided assistance with the collection process, but it

left a question as to how to distribute the contributions.

Montgomery said colleagues from other community foundations in similar situations reached out to share their insight, leading to the creation of the Ogle County Long Term Recovery Committee.

"We set up a separate account for relief funds and opened a pay pal account to give anyone the opportunity to contribute to the disaster relief fund," Cal Jacobs, OCLTRC chairman said regarding the days after the tornado. "We met with the leadership of the DeKalb County disaster relief fund along with the lead group of the Washington (Illinois) disaster relief program. We decided that there had to be a process put in place to make all affected families whole. I had a very diverse, dedicated, engaged group surrounding me, which made my job easier."

To date, nearly \$500,000 has been distributed to families affected by the tornado.

"We are so thankful to each person who said 'yes, I'll help' and most of those people have stuck with us for the duration," Montgomery said regarding the OCLTRC. "We've learned quite a lot through this process and though we occasionally ask ourselves if we'd do it again... the answer is always 'yes we would.'"

## A vision

Local resident and community leader Ray Schwartz became involved in the foundation after hearing Carmichael wanted to establish an ongoing fund for community grants.

Schwartz said he was invited in a letter from Carmichael to attend a meeting in September of 2005 to launch the organization. In the weeks that followed, Schwartz said the board was assembled and included himself, Carmichael, Karen Simmons, Phil Hasz, Ann Rice, Therese Almquist, Paul Chadwick, Jose Franco, Karen Hayden and Fred Rivera.

Schwartz said he knew it



Rochelle Area Community Foundation

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**

~ Margaret Mead (1901-1978)

Forty-two applications requesting a total of \$115,645 were received in February for 2016 grant awards. Of those, 36 were fully or partially funded. In 2015 \$45,000 in local grants requests from 31 programs were awarded

## Grantees

The 2016 Grantees include various programs of Rochelle Elementary Schools, Rochelle AYSO Soccer, Rochelle Community Action network, CASA of Ogle County, Chana Education Center, Creston School, Flagg Rochelle Community Park District, FLAP, Focus House, Girls Scouts

of Northern Illinois, HOPE of Ogle County, Hub City Senior Center, Kings School Library, the Kitchen Table, Flagg-Rochelle Library District, LULAC of Rochelle, Flagg Township Museum, Northern Illinois Food Bank, Pegasus Special Riders, Presbyterian Thrift Shop, Rochelle Middle School, Rochelle Christian Food Pantry, Rochelle Enrichment Center, Rochelle Interact Club, Rochelle Little League, Serenity Hospice & Home, St. Paul Lutheran School, Floyd J. Tilton VFW Post 3878, Village of Progress, St. Patrick Parish Outreach.

would be a good thing for the community, reflecting how well the process of establishing a foundation went.

"The fact that we got it established, operating, and making grants in essentially one year was quite an accomplishment," Schwartz said. "Board members, in their committee roles, were totally outstanding in making this happen."

Ann Rice remembers the time Carmichael took her and her husband, Ed, to Aruba. Carmichael shared his idea for a foundation and later asked Rice to be on the board. "I believe strongly that we are to give generously so this concept was exciting. To think of something that would last and give for perpetuity was awesome," Rice said, adding that in her role as first executive director of RACF, she knew even before the organization was established it would gain traction.

"Leonard was known for successful programs and he did his homework before he jumped into anything," Rice said. "We tried to keep the process simple and it was limited to our community so the list has always been relatively short... but what really hit me was that this was direct help to organiza-

tions and people we knew."

## Founder

For those that knew Carmichael had witnessed his generous spirit. A lifelong farmer and owner of Maplehurst Farms in Rochelle, Carmichael also "planted a seed" with his initial gift to the foundation. For the past 10 years, the community has continued to nourish and provide the care that perpetuates the organization to provide grants for years to come.

"It's just amazing awareness that Leonard had so much foresight," Rice said. "Something would happen after he was gone and Leonard knew that. The biggest example is the foundation's role with the aftermath of the tornado."

Schwartz, having known Carmichael through Rotary Club, had a good professional relationship.

"Leonard is a legend. His community support and philanthropy rank him at the very top of any Rochelle leader list," Schwartz. "If Leonard supported any community or Rotary need, you could be assured it would be met."

Montgomery, as current executive director, said she didn't know Carmichael well, but knew of his many contributions to the community.

"I understood the concept of endowed philanthropy through my involvement with RAMP in Rockford," Montgomery said. "In the short time between my being hired and Leonard's passing, he would call me on the phone at 6:30 a.m. — obviously beginning his work day well before I did."

Montgomery shared her defining moment came when the creation of the Community Leader Administrative Fund started.

"Phil Hasz gave a very generous lead gift to establish a fund that provides us with our own stream of income for operating," Montgomery said. "I know there is so much good work that RACF could do with enough resources. The board remains committed to grow the endowments to maximize grant monies available in the community, versus increasing staff and administrative capacity at this time. In the meantime, I try to remain patient while we grow and focus on core strategies that will get us there eventually."

"I love seeing it grow and benefit the community long term," Rice said with a smile. "Leonard was involved in a lot of projects when he was alive. I believe RACF depicts his legacy the best."