



Robinson Falls at Boch Hollow  
State Nature Preserve

Access to Robinson Falls is by permit only;  
permits can be obtained at [ohiodnr.gov](http://ohiodnr.gov).

## PRESERVING A LEGACY

### Forward-thinking gift allows donors' wishes to be fulfilled in perpetuity

**THE THICK WOODS** in Boch Hollow nature preserve are quiet and peaceful. A canopy of red oak, sugar maple, and yellow poplar trees sway above, and the scurry of animals can be heard as you hike along its numerous trails.

This peace and tranquility are exactly what Francis Kessler, PhD, and his wife Joyce loved about this area. After Dr. Kessler retired as a faculty member of The Ohio State University, they split their time between their Upper

Arlington home and their country home nestled in 600 acres in Hocking County.

Born and raised near Boch Hollow, nature preservation was a passion for Dr. Kessler. The couple, who began acquiring land in the area during the 1960s, wanted to make sure it would be protected and maintained after their deaths. The Kesslers donated the land to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and enlisted the help of The Columbus Foundation

to establish the *Francis W. and Joyce D. Kessler Fund*, an endowment that would both maintain the land and offer educational opportunities for schoolchildren.

"The Foundation is proud to continue to honor and steward the wishes of donors like the Kesslers," said Emily Savors, Director of Grants Management. "Through this fund, the Kesslers' beautiful property is preserved in its natural state. The State of Ohio uses this rare piece of

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## PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



**Douglas F. Kridler**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO

I recently had the opportunity to gather some folks for a conversation with Dr. Diane Meier, longtime Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care, part of NYC’s Mount Sinai Hospital, and 2008 recipient of a MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant” Fellowship.

**EARLIER THIS YEAR**, I read her statement from an interview, and have thought long and hard about it since then: “So my perspective on trauma has a bigger scale than it used to—a species-level and tribal-level scale. And, as I read the news, I don’t know whether we’re going to evolve our way out of this. The need to hate and kill the other is a determinative human characteristic, and it informs so many aspects of our society.”

I didn’t reach out to her initially after reading that, as unsettling as that declaration was. It wasn’t until mid-September, after listening to a podcast featuring Colson Whitehead, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Underground Railroad* among other great works, also a MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant” Fellowship awardee, that included this: “Maybe because we are competing over the same water source. We have always been pretty terrible (to others). The evil part is the basic trait, and the goodness and the empathy and the beautiful things we can create is sometimes the exceptional thing.”

So, two extraordinary folks with very different backgrounds, in two very different professions, one white, one Black, one 69, the other 52, each coming—one after much end-of-life personal experience and examination, and the younger dedicated to creative

introspection and expression and societal examination—to the same conclusion.

Those who have been on the receiving end of trauma-inducing abuse, racism, or other expressions of hate or harm, may not find Dr. Meier’s or Mr. Whitehead’s perspectives to be surprising at all. For those who have had a different life experience, these perspectives might be more surprising and shocking to read. In the words of 2021 MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant” Fellowship awardee and Columbus Foundation “True Original” from right here in our community, Hanif Abdurraqib, “The difference between a warning and a threat is all a matter of what you’ve lived through.”

The work to counteract these impulses that threaten the survival of our species is vitally important. And, there are other powerful and more beneficial forces at play (i.e., our natures to coexist, work with, and depend on each other). Richard Powers has examined how trees thrive underground as they compete for the nutrients they need. In the face of scarcity, there is resource sharing underground, across species of trees. Rather than evolution through competition, he points out nature’s hybrids of collaboration, symbiosis, and inter-connectedness that, if we approach our lives humbly, we, too, can achieve.

Our featured Celebration of Philanthropy speaker, Heather McGhee, author of *The Sum of Us*, stated, “It costs us so much to remain divided. We can choose to keep acting as if we are not on the same team, or we can let the proximity of so much difference reveal our common humanity.” The bonds of our union may be frayed, and rancor, defeatism, and fear continue to interrupt progress at a time when we don’t have a second to lose, but that must not be what we will let define us, or stop us from doing beautiful things.



This issue is dedicated to the memory of our colleague Donna Jordan, who recently passed away. Donna was a beloved member of the Foundation family for 22 years. Her smile and warm, welcoming spirit will be missed by all.

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To assist donors and others in strengthening and improving our community for the benefit of all its residents.

#### OUR PROMISE

To help you help others through the most effective philanthropy possible.

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Photos by Challen Brown, unless noted.



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*Pictured, clockwise from top left:*

- 1** Francis W. and Joyce D. Kessler. (Photo from The Columbus Foundation archives)
- 2** In 2020, a new pedestrian bridge was installed to allow easier access to the Boch Hollow trail system.
- 3** Rob Meyer, Southeast Ohio Preserve Manager, at Boch Hollow's West trail head.
- 4** The Kesslers' former home is now utilized for educational purposes, welcoming schoolchildren for field trips to explore nature.
- 5** Seven miles of trails run through Boch Hollow. Meyer explained that trails at most state nature preserves, including Boch Hollow, are purposefully narrow for several reasons: to minimize impact to the ecosystem; to ensure less bare soil is exposed, minimizing soil loss or erosion; and because they require less maintenance.

## Preserving a Legacy [continued from cover]

land for preservation and educational efforts, where schools and youth-serving organizations have a place to experience the natural environment in a quiet and remote setting and residents can hike and experience the beauty and solitude of the area.”

As a professor, Dr. Kessler was committed to utilizing the land to help children learn about the wonders of nature.

“One of our highest priorities is fulfilling the wish of the Kesslers by providing nature education for local schoolchildren,” said Jeff Johnson, Chief, Division of Natural Areas and Preserves for ODNR. “The staff has developed an entire series of different programs targeting students of different ages and teaching on a multitude of topics. We have worked with the local schools in the county to become an integral part of the curriculum. We are not a simple ‘field trip’ experience.”

Johnson hopes that by seeing, doing, and experiencing first-hand lessons in ecology, biology, geology, and even math and English,

students will get a deeper understanding of the world around them. One added benefit of the endowment is that it allows Boch Hollow to assist with transportation costs to bring students to the site—an issue that often impedes schools from getting students out of their traditional classroom setting.

In addition to being an educational site, the nature preserve is also a popular hiking spot.

“Being a large preserve, it has provided an opportunity for us to create a rather extensive trail system that takes hikers through all the different habitat types found here,” said Johnson. The seven miles of trails pass through dry ridgetop forests, young successional forests, small grass/prairie-like openings, mesic hillsides, and valleys, along with intermittent streams.

Johnson said the endowment has provided funds not only for implementing educational programs but also for improving the site for everyone’s benefit. Most recently, a large paved parking area and pedestrian bridge

“Boch Hollow is unique among state nature preserves in that we have set aside areas to allow students to really get into their studies. Normally, visitors must remain on trails and are asked to just observe and look at nature. At Boch, we encourage students during their classes to wander off the trails (with guides) to get up close and personal with nature—things normally taboo in a nature preserve.”

— **JEFF JOHNSON, CHIEF, DIVISION OF NATURAL AREAS AND PRESERVES FOR THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

were installed to allow easier access to the trail system.

Thanks to the passion and commitment of Dr. and Mrs. Kessler, this land will continue to be treasured for generations to come.



# Festival for Good



ON OCTOBER 8, people gathered at Gravity in Franklinton for the annual **Festival For Good**, an opportunity to connect with, explore, and purchase with purpose from 25 social enterprise vendors creating a positive impact in our community.

Organizations brought awareness to essential causes—from youth experiencing homelessness and workforce development to sustainable community solutions for food waste and the climate crisis. Each social enterprise helps residents in the central Ohio region thrive.

Festival for Good (originally called the SEA Change Festival) was founded in 2016 to uplift

inspiring businesses that have made social change a key part of their identity and mission.

“There are over 100 social enterprises who operate in central Ohio, and most of them are small businesses with limited marketing budgets. By coming together for this one-day event, they can attract thousands of potential new customers at a fraction of the cost of doing so independently, amplifying their impact and spreading their mission along the way,” said one of the founders, Patrick Westerlund.

Congratulations to the planning team, participants, and volunteers who worked hard to make this year’s event another success!



More than 100 social enterprises in central Ohio help our community thrive.



## Better Together platform connects donors to community projects

**BETTER TOGETHER**, The Columbus Foundation’s crowdfunding platform, provides ongoing opportunities for individuals to support Columbus nonprofits as they work to raise visibility into their programming needs, rally their supporters, and find new donors. Launched in 2017, the platform has featured a number of projects in 2021 that are helping nonprofits adapt as they continue to serve their clients during COVID-19.

Over the past six months, 93 percent of Better Together projects have met or exceeded their fundraising goals (as of October 4), and more than \$91,000 has been raised, which includes \$12,240 in grants leveraged from the Foundation’s Center for HumanKindness.

One recent project that surpassed its fundraising goal, **Bikes for All People**, was launched to help Bikes for All People cover the parts and labor necessary to prepare bikes and helmets for children. Woody Patrick, Executive Director, said the nonprofit’s program has grown every year since inception, and over the past two years has seen exceptional growth.



Photo courtesy of Bikes for All People

“Keeping up with demand for bikes has been quite challenging,” he explained.

The organization accepts donated bikes for people of all ages, and employees and volunteers complete any necessary repairs before selling them in its bike shop or gifting them to people in the neighborhood. Patrick said they donate more than 200 children’s bikes per year and sell around 250.

“We accept used bikes of all types, refurbish when possible, and sell them at affordable prices,” said Patrick.

“The joy of repairing these bikes is multiplied by the joy of the children who ride them. What could be better than healthier and happier kids? I am thankful to be part of this program.”

— **WOODY PATRICK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BIKES FOR ALL PEOPLE**

“Sometimes a bike needs minor repair, like a chain or tire, and sometimes it is more extensive. Non-repairable bikes may yield useful parts for other bikes. Families with small children will get a free bike and helmet for each child. It is our mission, and a personal pleasure, to help families enjoy health and happiness through biking.”



DONOR FEATURE

# A Gift from the Heart

Greer Foundation Grants \$1 Million to Mid-Ohio Food Collective



Dick Greer and his daughter, Lynn, at a Columbus Foundation event. Photo courtesy of Lynn Greer

**CELEBRATING A PROUD LEGACY OF GIVING** was at the core of a recent decision by the *Greer Foundation*, a Supporting Foundation of The Columbus Foundation, to give an extraordinary \$1 million gift to help Mid-Ohio Food Collective (MOFC) continue its mission to end hunger one nourishing meal at a time and co-create a community where everyone thrives.

“My father wanted to make a lasting gift,” explained Lynn Greer of her father Dick Greer, who established the foundation in 1995. “He really feels that it’s a critical point in our growth as a community and returning to some sense of normalcy from the pandemic, and he wanted to leave a legacy gift.”

“This incredible gift is a testament to the commitment of the Greer Foundation and its founder, Dick Greer, to positively impact our community. Through this \$1 million grant to Mid-Ohio Food Collective, the foundation is continuing its mission to support not only youth, the focus of their grantmaking, but so many others who have been affected by COVID-19 and its ongoing challenges.”

— TAMI DURRENCE, VICE PRESIDENT FOR SUPPORTING FOUNDATIONS

local nonprofits in a variety of areas, many of which are focused on youth, including funding to help youth experiencing homelessness through Huckleberry House and Star House, and the critical needs of kids coming out of foster care. Greer said many of the grants awarded over the past five years have been centered around making sure the foundation is playing an active role in that space.

“Then COVID hit and we pivoted in the 2020 grant cycle to really talk about the most basic need, which was food—and how the lack of having food in this community was playing a role during the pandemic,” Greer explained. “As a board, we started asking some hard questions about what role the Greer Foundation could play and where we could make the greatest amount of difference and reach youth and provide nutrition and food in general.”

Greer said her father is passionate about giving back, and encouraging others to do the same.

“He wants to demonstrate that Columbus is a very giving community. He was lucky enough to be successful here in his hometown. He’s hoping to raise the awareness not only of the work Mid-Ohio Food Collective is doing but the importance of giving in general.”

The board discussed options based on what the foundation had supported in the past.

“Since we’re in the building industry, I thought he would naturally go back to shelter, but he was very clear that the most basic need was food and he wanted that to be the focus of his gift. So, this one comes from my father, from his heart.”

The gift will support MOFC’s Rooted in You campaign, launched in 2019 to support innovative and forward-thinking ways to focus on a healthy future as a collaborative.

Since its inception, the Greer Foundation has supported

## Grants Support Expansion Efforts at Three Area Schools

**THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION AND ITS DONORS** have a generous track record of supporting high performing schools—from start-up phase to scaling. A recent trio of grants will help three schools continue their growth and expand their footprints and student capacity.

Knowledge is Power Program Columbus (KIPP Columbus), Metro Schools, and United Schools Network (USN) are three central Ohio schools with similar trajectories in terms of enrollment growth, and each has received continued accolades and merits related to the strong preparation and academic performance of its students.

In September, the Foundation’s Governing Committee approved grants of \$250,000 each to support the continued advancement of KIPP Columbus, USN, and Metro, with each engaged in efforts to raise capital funds for extensive renovations of newly acquired buildings (USN and Metro) and to help with new construction costs (KIPP Columbus).

Established in 2006, Metro Early College High School was born out of the desire of both The Ohio State University and Battelle to create a “small” STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) school with a “big footprint.” It was the first STEM school in the state of Ohio. In 2013, middle school programming was added, dubbing the educational effort solely as Metro.

With the support of Battelle and OSU, Metro, which currently has enrollment of 900 students grades 6–12, is preparing to renovate the historic Indianola Middle School, designed nearly a century ago by Howard Dwight Smith, architect of OSU’s Thompson Library expansion and Ohio Stadium. Meka Pace, Superintendent of Metro Schools, said the expansion is necessary to serve more students.

“We’re out of room here,” said Pace. “We’ve utilized every available spot and major hallway in this building that we possibly could. Having more space allows us to serve more students in central Ohio.”

The grant to Metro was made possible thanks to the following Unrestricted Funds at the Foundation: *Barbara J. Haddox Fund*, *Robert B. Hurst Fund*, *Mr. and Mrs. Derrol R. Johnson Fund*, and the *Theodora Roberts Fund*. The grants to both KIPP and USN were made possible thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor.



Photo courtesy of Metro

“Everyone knows STEM as science, technology, engineering, and math but we really think of STEM as a universal term—strategies that engage minds. It’s a mindset in how teaching and learning happens here in our building,” said Pace, who emphasized this is evident throughout the school. “It encompasses all disciplines within teaching and learning. STEM happens in art class and English class and our social sciences classes. Really, it’s about taking those critical thinking skills and being able to solve problems.”

The Foundation is proud to invest in the future leaders of our community by providing financial backing for these critical capital needs.

“No grant category quite lives up to the enduring nature as much as capital grantmaking—literally bricks and mortar, as well as mission critical equipment for nonprofits,” said Dan Sharpe, Vice President for Community Research and Grants Management. “High performing educational institutions play such a critical role in the future trajectory of students and our community, and the Foundation’s grants will help USN, KIPP, and Metro accomplish just that.”



# Books that Inspired Me

with  
**Cathy Lyttle**

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
AND CHIEF HUMAN  
RESOURCES OFFICER,  
WORTHINGTON INDUSTRIES

Cathy Lyttle at Worthington  
Industries headquarters



**A**NYONE WHO KNOWS CATHY LYTTLE understands that people are her thing. With more than 35 years of professional experience across a number of fields, from radio to strategic communications, Cathy knows that success begins with people.

Today, she is Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer for Worthington Industries. Cathy has been recognized for her expertise and leadership in many ways and plays an active role in the community, including serving as the Chairman of the *Columbus Youth Foundation*, a Supporting Foundation of The Columbus Foundation. She and her husband, Jeff, established the *Cathy and Jeff Lyttle Family Fund* in 2015 to help facilitate their philanthropic giving.

We sat down with Cathy to talk about what books have guided her through her life, and what inspires her today.

► **Is there a certain genre you are drawn to as a reader?**

I tend to navigate to nonfiction for sure. As I thought about this, I realized I tend to gravitate to books about strong women, not exclusively, but those probably are the majority of the books that I read. I enjoy history and politics. It's inspiring to read about particularly women that blazed a trail. I know that many of us stand on their shoulders. I've gotten a lot from a number of autobiographies or biographies of women who, in some cases, were cast into a position that they maybe weren't ready for, and I learned a lot from them.

► **Is there a book you regularly recommend to others? If so, which one and why?**

There is a dear friend of mine who gave me a copy of *Gift from the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh many years ago. The book was written in 1955. The author spends two weeks at the sea and just has these amazing reflections that I think definitely translate to today when it comes to women and their roles. I have probably given 20 copies away to special women in my life along the way. And then in the role that I'm in at Worthington Industries, we read a book together in our HR group, *The Dream Manager* by Matthew Kelly, and it so aligns with our philosophy about people and helping them find their purpose and dreams, so I've definitely given that away. And most recently *The Conversation* by Robert Livingston, certainly a book many corporations are reading about diversity and inclusion. That's one I've passed on, too.

► **If there was one author you could spend the afternoon with, who would it be and why?**

I think it would be a toss-up between Brené Brown and Jon Meacham. They are two favorites of mine. Brené's *Dare to Lead* really reminded me of the importance of courage and vulnerability, particularly through the past 18 months in the role that I'm in today. And Jon's *The Soul of America* helped me get through some of the insanity in our country the past couple years. If I could spend the afternoon with them together, that would be amazing!

► **What book(s) has had the greatest impact on you and why?**

A friend gave me the founding mothers of NPR book this summer, *Susan, Linda, Nina & Cokie* by Lisa Napoli. It is extraordinary in so many ways. I started out in radio, and I loved everything about it. What these women went through ahead of my time just to be recognized and to be heard was amazing. They were trailblazers. But they weren't just trailblazers. They had a bond with each other, they lifted one another up, they had each other's backs. And that for me is really at the core of who I am and how I think I try to get along in this work—making sure we are lifting one another up.

► **What book(s) are you currently reading? What's next?**

I just started *My Life in Full*, by Indra Nooyi, former Chairman and CEO of PepsiCo. It is an account of her struggles and triumphs at the top of the corporate world while being honest about the fact that she's a mother, a wife, and she has a life—and how she balanced all of that. That speaks to me on a lot of levels. I'm excited to read both Cokie's book *We Are Our Mothers' Daughters* and a book about her written by her husband Steven V. Roberts, *Cokie: A Life Well Lived*.

► **What are a few other books you've loved?**

*Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen

*Gorillas in Our Midst: The Story of the Columbus Zoo Gorillas* by Jeff Lyttle

*When We Were Very Young (Winnie-the-Pooh)* by A.A. Milne

*Personal History* by Katharine Graham

*His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* by Jon Meacham

## SQUASHING BEEF AND SAVING LIVES

### Program works to curb violence in Columbus' streets

**HALT VIOLENCE'S MISSION** is to “squash beef and save lives.” The organization, founded in 2014 by Thell Robinson, is a grassroots nonprofit committed to helping mediate disputes ahead of violence and to creating a solid foundation for youth and young adults by offering them necessary tools not just to survive, but thrive.

Halt Violence's Moral Therapy Initiative is a program designed by Robinson to support the development of coping mechanisms and life skills that can help end cycles of poverty and violence for community members. The program helps individuals develop skills in various areas, with an emphasis on mental health, academic, and cognitive skills.

In 2021, grants from the Foundation's *Emergency Response Fund—Youth* and the *Ingram-White Castle Foundation*, a Supporting Foundation of The Columbus Foundation, were awarded to Halt Violence to support its ongoing efforts, during a time when Columbus' violent crime is at an all-time high. The funding provides support for two street mentors whose job, Robinson explained, is to cultivate relationships with teens, young adults, and adults in the “hot areas” where violence is prevalent.

“Halt Violence provides a holistic approach to violence prevention, humanizing all involved parties, and addressing the crevasse that exists between standard responsive policing methods and the prevention of violence and crime, particularly for youth,” said Danielle Tong, Community Research and Grants Management Officer. “The Foundation's investment meant Halt Violence was able to add frontline staff members that work to prevent violence and to stabilize a child's life through adulthood.”

Robinson said one of the organization's primary goals is to get individuals who are involved in arguments and disputes to a safe, neutral site that allows them to communicate with no weapons about what actually is leading up to the potential violence.

“We don't allow ourselves to dictate the mediation; we're just there to observe,” said Robinson. “When you have two people or groups that are willing to meet, that is a sign of success because it's a vulnerable situation for them to meet.”

Last year, Halt Violence mediated 70 such disputes.

Robinson is in a unique and valuable position to connect with his clients, as he once lived a life on the streets selling drugs, first in the Washington D.C. area and then in Columbus. After a stint in prison, he reformed his life and earned a degree in theology. He has also received numerous certifications for trauma-responsive care, youth mediation, and leadership.

“A person needs to be humble in order to communicate,” he said. “We're going into the community with no guns and no vests—strictly off of good intentions. If we go into that community with the wrong intentions about what we stand on, we're not making it out. You have to be humble and be about the people that are in that community. That's the key, and how Halt Violence has been around for seven years.”





## SCHOLARSHIP SPOTLIGHT:

# WaTeasa Freeman

The Columbus Foundation is proud to facilitate 300 Scholarship Funds that help make a difference in the lives of young people chasing their dreams. Here's one of their amazing stories.

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?** My name is WaTeasa Freeman. I am 22 years old, and I love writing, baking, and playing the Sims. My family and I moved to Columbus in 2006 and I grew up on the North Side. I attended Woodward Park Middle School and Fort Hayes High School. While in school, I played softball and was the president of the Poetry Slam Club.

**Growing up, what did you want to be when you were older?** As a child, my career goals changed often—most involved entertainment or education. I wanted to be an actress and a schoolteacher. I decided I wanted to pursue journalism my junior year of high school and I am very glad I chose this path.

**You applied for, and received, numerous scholarships from funds at the Foundation. What did these scholarships mean to you?**

Each scholarship meant I had a fighting chance at success. I did not grow up wealthy, and I started off high school homeless, so knowing I had an opportunity to attend college was such a blessing. It also meant I had people who believed in me. Each donor I had a chance to meet reminded me of how successful I can be. These words became so powerful to me and helped keep me going on days that were hard. There are thousands of students who apply, and to be chosen meant I was representing not just myself but my donors. My scholarships also provided a comfort for my family. My mother was always worrying about how things would work out for us and The Columbus Foundation took away so much stress about my future.

**Where did you attend college and what did you major in?** I attended Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee. I majored in communications with a concentration in journalism and a minor in Africana studies. I graduated magna cum laude on May 1, 2021.

**Were there people who inspired you or influenced you during your college career? Who helped you achieve your goal?** One of my biggest inspirations was my younger sister. I wanted to show her that, despite the circumstances given to us, we can be successful. Dr. Arielle Vincent and Professor Karen Russell at Tennessee State were a major part of my college career. They both mentored me and even helped me get some of my first internships.



WaTeasa Freeman and her mother at WaTeasa's college graduation in May.

Photo courtesy of WaTeasa Freeman

I could always count on them to guide me and help me improve as a writer. More than anything, my father was my driving force. He passed away in 2012 long before I entered college. He always told me I could do anything in this world, and I believed him. He did not have a high school diploma so every step I took I did to make him proud. My degree represents so many people other than myself.

**I understand you graduated this past spring. What are you up to now—and what are your plans for the future?** I currently work for the USA Today Network in Louisiana. I am the food and culture reporter in Lafayette, Louisiana. I moved here in August and I am so happy about it. In the future, I hope I can continue doing what I love and bring people meaningful news.

**“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”**

— ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

**WaTeasa was awarded scholarships from the following funds at The Columbus Foundation:**

*Easton Community Foundation Scholarship Fund*

*C. Henry and Naomi B. Peterson Fund*

*Greater Columbus Community Helping Hands, Inc. Scholarship Fund*

*Cage Family Scholarship Fund*

*James L. Allen Scholarship Fund*

# Unique program encourages student interaction



Olentangy Liberty High School and Northland High School students participating in an Erase the Space meet-up on Otterbein University's campus in 2019. Photo courtesy of Derek Burtch

**WHAT STARTED AS A CLASSROOM PROJECT** between teachers in two central Ohio high schools has blossomed into Erase the Space, a nonprofit organization that gives students and teachers a broader perspective of life in our city.

Derek Burtch and his friend and former graduate school colleague Amelia Gordon often shared stories of their challenges and successes as teachers. During one session in 2016, they had an idea: what if they partnered up and gave the freshman English honors students at their high schools, Olentangy Liberty and Columbus South, respectively, the opportunity to have a shared learning experience?

Together, they developed a program that facilitates a writing exchange between classrooms in order to “help repair public discourse.” Students trade letters and opinion pieces and use online communication tools like Twitter and Slack before meeting in person. Partnering up, students “develop an idea to get teenagers from different backgrounds and areas of our city together authentically to have a discourse on problems facing their community,” according to the Erase the Space website. The focus for the past two years has been the segregation of Columbus.

The project got underway in January 2017. After a few months, the classes met. In about two minutes it was an “explosion of conversation,” said Burtch. Lasting friendships were formed, with some partners, now in college, communicating to this day.

This school year, the program is active at six central Ohio schools, including four high schools: Columbus South paired with Olentangy and New Albany paired with Whitehall and two middle schools, Gahanna Middle School South and South Middle School (Columbus Schools).

After the initial introduction, Burtch said teachers engage students at both schools in the same lessons once or twice a month. Students then fill out a response sheet about how they felt, what they didn't know, etc. and then they exchange with their partners from the other school.

Preparing teachers to facilitate the program is also a critical part of the process, and with the pandemic affecting schools, Erase the Space worked with Otterbein University to develop the Networks for Excellent Teaching Hub (NEXt Hub), a community of networks engaging educators in antiracist work in their schools. During the 2020–2021 school year, a teacher exchange called “From ‘Civil’ Voyeurism to Civic Action” launched.

“Teachers were paired up and discussed the move from just teaching about social justice to acting on it from our positions as teachers,” Burtch said.

In September, Erase the Space received a \$10,000 grant from the *Columbus Foundation Racial Equity Fund* to continue its work with NEXt Hub.

Gordon has relocated and is now teaching in Washington, DC. Burtch, now at Olentangy High School, splits his time between teaching and running Erase the Space. He is excited about the future of the program, and the possibilities for expansion, including the hope to involve younger students.

“We have science teachers at Independence High School and Westerville South High School working together this year to create curriculum to participate in an exchange next year, as well as elementary teachers in Westerville and Whitehall collaborating to adapt Erase the Space for elementary classrooms.”





THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION

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## 2021 Celebration of Philanthropy Awards

The 2021 Celebration of Philanthropy awards, honoring extraordinary philanthropists and standout nonprofit organizations in our community, were announced on September 9.



### Tom and Nancy Lurie

*The Harrison M. Sayre Award*, given in honor of the Foundation's founder and volunteer director for 25 years, recognizes leadership in philanthropy in central Ohio. This year, Tom and Nancy Lurie received the award. Longtime supporters of the Columbus community, the Luries have given their time, talent, and treasure to organizations supporting the arts, social services, women's issues, and the Jewish faith.



### IMPACT Community Action

*The Columbus Foundation Award* recognizes organizations that have made a difference in the quality of life in our community. This year, IMPACT Community Action received this recognition. With a mission to fight poverty by providing hope-inspiring help and real opportunities for self-sufficiency, IMPACT's core programs center on benefiting those with barriers to success and stability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, IMPACT, led by CEO Robert 'Bo' Chilton, has been instrumental in preventing evictions for thousands of residents in Franklin County. As part of the award, IMPACT received a \$50,000 grant.