

BTCE

Fall 2023

NEWS Together we can make
life here even better

Learning and Growing Together

Setting The Stage for High School Success
A Champion for First-Generation College Students
Early Literacy Groups Support Families
and Lifelong Learning
Portraits of Generosity:
Matt King and Brian Cruey

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Message from Leadership



In this edition of BTCF News, we share stories that underscore the vital role of education throughout one’s life journey, from early literacy to higher education enrollment. A common theme unites these narratives: breaking down barriers to access programs and resources that elevate individual aspirations and goals.

We also help our donor community maximize their impact by fostering equitable giving practices that dismantle systemic impediments to resources. We will continue to expand equity as a through-line in all our work in the coming year. With the launch of our Equity Initiative and the addition of our newest staff member Alÿcia Bacon, Community Engagement Officer for Equity and Inclusion, we will support leaders of color as they advance a vision of philanthropy that uplifts burgeoning communities of color in the region.

None of this progress would be possible without our community partners—nonprofits, donors, schools, and community leaders. As we look forward to 2024, we do so with deep gratitude, a clear sense of purpose, and a commitment to creating even greater positive change.

Peter Taylor, *President*

COLUMBIA COUNTY
Baby & Me
Story Time
at Claverack
Free Library

NANCY SMITH, a retired day care provider of 50 years, volunteers to guide story time at the Claverack Library. The weekly program supports caregivers by providing a space for social connection through early learning. In a rural setting, this group provides a welcome touch point for parents. Baby & Me story time launched in the summer of 2023. It is funded by BTCF’s Early Literacy in Columbia County initiative.



Region One middle schoolers stretch their boundaries at Indian Mountain School ropes course.

LITCHFIELD COUNTY
Making The Leap

Forward-Thinking Summer Program For Region One Middle Schoolers

2023 marked the second successful season of Region One’s summer enrichment program for middle schoolers. With funding already secured for its 2024 season, this transformative initiative has been officially named the “Summer Mountaineer Experience.”

The program unites students from the various middle schools within the district who will converge at the regional high school. It provides a combination of social-emotional learning and physical, academic, and creative activities all tied to the local community. Participants in the summer program have shown a higher level of engagement as they enter high school, joining athletic programs as well as arts and science extracurriculars.

One of the standout features of the program is the variety of activities offered, and students can select ones that align with their interests. Morning sessions include outdoor pursuits such as hiking, paddle boarding, canoeing, orienteering, rock climbing, and ropes courses, while afternoons are dedicated to agricultural education, STEM, yoga, and a range of creative endeavors, from flower-pressing to pottery.

The Summer Mountaineer Experience is entirely free for its attendees, and the program has become a vital resource for students who might not otherwise attend a summer program due to financial or transportation barriers. Generous grants from BTCF’s Fund for the Northwest Corner cover the program’s costs, while school bus transportation is provided at no charge through funding from the Jane and Dana Creel Fund.

Parent and student feedback underscores the program’s effectiveness. Parents have noted its positive impact on their children’s social needs, while students enthusiastically report having loads of fun and learning valuable lessons about themselves.

Program Director Barbara Hockstader noted, “In just two weeks, students built their summer community around the shared values of respect, fun, positivity, and inclusion. Students dared to reach out beyond their friend groups to make new friends from other schools. In tricky situations, they practiced talking, listening and accepting differing points of view. They created a magical sense of belonging.” ■

BERKSHIRE

A Champion for First-Generation Latino College Students

BTCF Scholarship Recipient Deisy Escobar

The process of applying to college can be overwhelming for any student. First-generation college students face additional hurdles as they navigate the college search, application, and financial aid processes independently, often acting as their own mentors and educators. But as Deisy Escobar approached the end of her high school years in 2022 and 2023, she knew she wanted to attend college and would find a way to make it happen. She began navigating the college admissions process, learning by doing.

Her path became a little clearer when Amy Taylor, Senior Community Engagement Officer for Education, presented BTCF's Scholarship Program to high school students at Mount Everett High School. Deisy applied to the scholarship program and was awarded three scholarships, closing the gap in the vital financial support required to make college a reality. Now that she is well into the first semester of her B.A. program, she is eager to share her wisdom with fellow Latino students facing the college applications process for the first time.

Deisy had been volunteering as an ESOL tutor since 2020 for Literacy Network (LitNet), which offers free one-on-one English instruction to speakers of other languages, as well as U.S. citizenship classes and other adult education support. So, when she had the idea to host college admissions workshops, LitNet's Executive Director Leigh Doherty saw an opportunity that aligned with their mission and developed a position for Deisy, the First-Generation College Coordinator. In the role she serves as a community ambassador supporting and educating first-generation college applicants and their families about the admissions and financial aid processes.

The First-Generation College Council, another of Deisy's affiliations, is comprised of ten Latino young adults from Monument Mountain and Mount Everett High Schools working together to provide additional support to students like themselves. The Council is planning a First-Generation College-Goer Fair to be presented by LitNet in spring 2024.

Being an advocate for the Latino Berkshire community goes back further than Deisy's college admission support program.

One of her earliest and most enduring endeavors is her role as co-host of the radio show "Mundo Latino: Recordando Tus Raíces," a labor of love she shares with her mother, Martha Escobar. Remarkably, Deisy was just eight years old when she took to the microphone with her mother. This fall, 14 years into the production, the mother-daughter duo was nominated by State Senator Paul Mark and honored for their outstanding radio production at the Massachusetts State House during the Latino Excellence Awards, an event celebrating Latino leaders and their contributions to their communities.

Deisy plans to pursue coursework in psychology and criminal justice. When asked what else she wished to share about her story, she added, "I am grateful for all the guidance and help I received from Berkshire Taconic that made it possible for me to achieve my dream."

BTCF's scholarship program has been pivotal in supporting students in our region. In 2023, we awarded a record-breaking \$868,000 in scholarships, marking a 26% increase from the previous year. The talented cohort of scholarship recipients ranged from

college-bound high school seniors like Deisy to adult learners pursuing continued education, and students focused on vocational programs. In 2024, Berkshire Taconic continues to expand the scholarship portfolio while working strategically to support under-resourced youth and adult learners reaching to attain certificates and degrees. ■

SCHOLARSHIP
APPLICATIONS
OPEN
01/01/2024



- Application opens January 1
- Applications due March 15
- Awards announced June 1

berkshiretaconic.org/scholarships

COLUMBIA COUNTY On the Cover



LINDA MCGRIFF, the dynamic Director of Education and Youth Development for Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood (GHPN), has a busy weekly schedule conducting early literacy enrichment classes at Columbia County's schools and public libraries. She is pictured here captivating the 4-year-olds in Maria Trupia's Pre-K class at Montgomery Smith Elementary with her storytelling. Linda's community classes welcome caregivers, too, providing easy opportunities to engage with their children's learning and meet other families. Linda and GHPN's Executive Director Joan Hunt discussed their work at a panel event in October, emphasizing the benefits of boosting early literacy in Columbia County for future learning success. GHPN is BTCF's lead partner in the Early Literacy and Learning Network serving Columbia County. ■

PORTRAITS OF GENEROSITY

A Perfect Philanthropic Match

Opening A Donor Advised Fund Streamlines Support For Local Causes

Being employed by a nonprofit in the Berkshires, Brian Cruey remains acutely aware of the role charitable giving plays in both “tying people to the work and funding the work,” a pair of priorities that inspire him and his husband Matthew King to contribute to the causes they care most about in their community. Chief among them are the environment (in particular land conservation and protection) and diversity initiatives (especially programs that support gay people and gay youth). “It’s just crucial,” he says of supporting the community.

Community Support, Nonprofit Support

Neither individual sees himself as a philanthropist per se, but they believe it is one of many ways to serve the community they call home. Cruey and King relocated to the Berkshires over a dozen years ago. “It’s quiet and busy, rural but also metropolitan, and naturally and culturally rich in so many ways,” says Cruey. The couple shared a desire to understand, get involved, and support their new community, which is what first led them to Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF). As an organization with deep local roots and broad knowledge of community issues, BTCF was the perfect place to get started.

“We very much love the community, want to be part of it, and do what we can to support it in many different ways,” says King.

Cruey and King view charitable giving as one of many ways to support organizations they care for, and fully understand the impact of each and every gift. Cruey has worked for nonprofits for many years – he currently oversees nine local properties in his position as Portfolio Director for the Southern Berkshires with The Trustees of Reservations, and his exposure to organizations of various sizes has only reinforced the importance of support, in any way possible. When King took a job that offered a charitable match program as part of its benefits package, they began to think about giving in a different way.

Maximize Matching Program Benefits

As King and Cruey learned more about BTCF, they decided to open a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) as a flexible and practical way to support the variety of causes they care about. They appreciated the simplified means of giving that empowers donor advisors to choose what causes to support and when. King, an attorney, quickly realized another benefit –

his DAF could help him fully leverage the matching program offered by his employer. Like many similar programs, the match program is a fixed amount of money his employer provides to match donations that an individual makes to a qualifying nonprofit. That amount resets every year, so any funds that remain after a year of giving are effectively lost. King views the charitable matching program as a key part of his compensation, and, despite giving to several organizations every year, would find himself “leaving money on the table” at year end. After making his gifts to a variety of nonprofits over the course of the year, King now contributes to his DAF and directs the remaining match money to BTCF. “This way, I’m taking full advantage of my match benefit, supporting Berkshire Taconic, and growing my Donor Advised Fund for future charitable giving.”

Over the years, Cruey and King have deepened their ties in the community and with BTCF. As a resident of Otis, King was invited to join the advisory committee for BTCF’s South Berkshire County Fund — an endowed fund that is a permanent resource for the 15 towns in southern Berkshire County. King looks forward to their continued involvement, “Berkshire Taconic does a great job of working with donors to direct funds and energies to places that need them.”

HOW TO SIMPLIFY YOUR GIVING WITH A BTCF DONOR ADVISED FUND

1. Open a Fund with Berkshire Taconic.
2. Tell us what causes and organizations you care about.
3. Our charitable giving experts take care of the rest!

berkshiretaconic.org/simplify

Planned Giving Spotlight

NANCY F. PERKINS 1927-2022, MILLBROOK, NY
NORTHEAST DUTCHESS COUNTY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Nancy Perkins made her first donation to BTCF in 1998. Over the decades, she became a longstanding donor, directing her anonymous giving toward various causes in her home community.

Her bequest and remarkable contributions include an endowed scholarship through BTCF, the Northeast Dutchess Scholarship Fund, offering substantial support for recipients.

In Nancy’s words, “Family giving was part of life. We always helped and felt an obligation to give back.”

berkshiretaconic.org/planned-giving

Regional Roundup: Food Security and Housing



Scan to view
expanded
content.

Fresh and Healthy Food Initiative, Columbia County

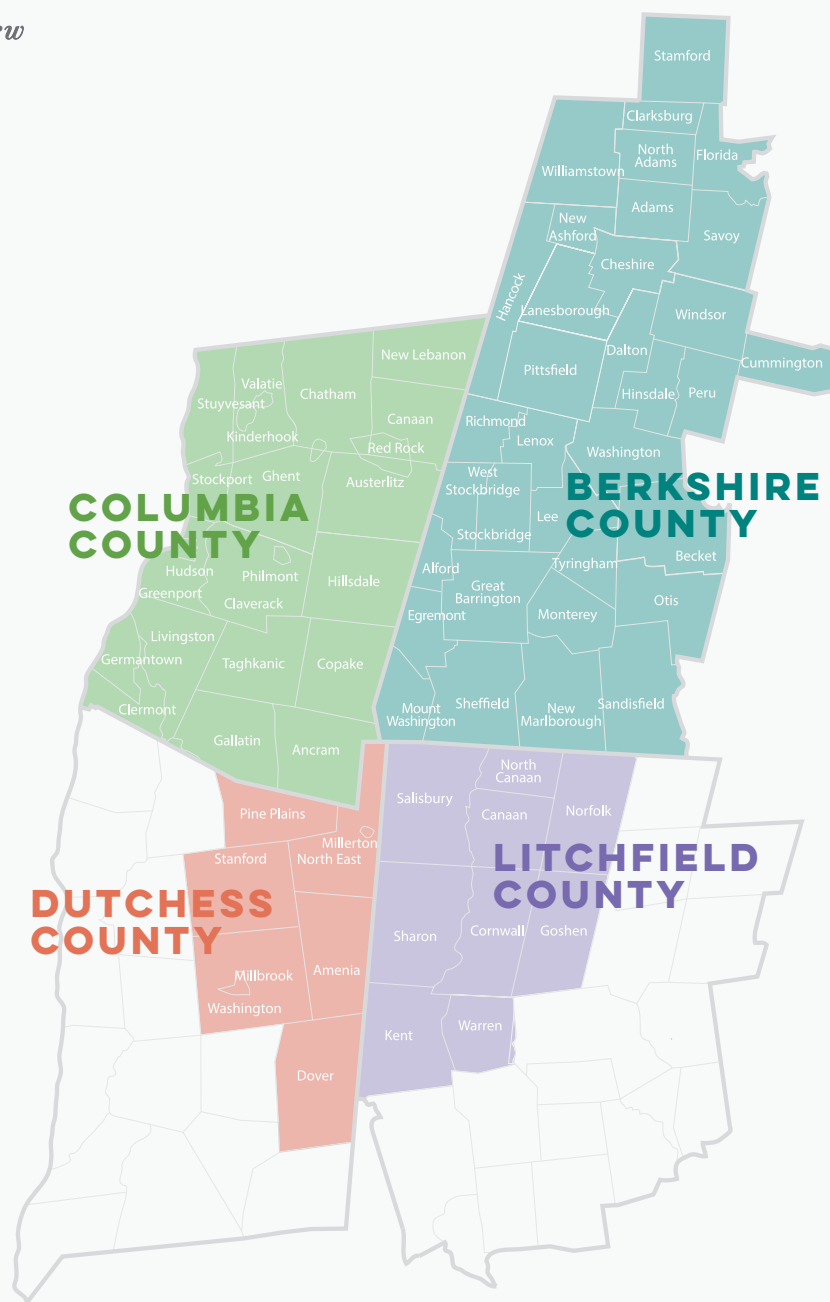
Two new food pantries
open at Taconic Hills
Central and Germantown
high schools.
Long Table Harvest's
gleaning program
distributes surplus produce
from 15 farms to 17
community food sites.

Comida de Vida/Food of Life food pantry at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Amenia

Fridays from 3 to 5 p.m.
Food pantry providing nine
meals per week, includes
fresh produce, eggs, meat,
bread, dairy, canned and
dry goods, toiletries, paper
products and diapers.

Food Distribution at MESA Episcopal Mission in Dover Plains

by Northeast Dutchess
Immigrant Services (NEDIS)
Friday evenings from
6 to 8 p.m. serving
around 120 individuals.



Community Development Block Grants: Food Security

\$1,092,123 mobilized for
ten community nonprofits
to invest in kitchen
infrastructure
and equipment for food
security programs
throughout
Berkshire county.

**Affordable housing
development
in Pittsfield by
Westside Legends,**
a neighborhood
revitalization group,
supported by BTCF's
Community Fund.

Create Housing Opportunity

A new grant program
received first round of
applicants for cross-sector
housing affordability
initiatives in
Litchfield County.

Housing + Jobs + Conservation

Community forum
had 200 attendees.
Co-presented with
Salisbury Forum.
Supported by
BTCF's Fund for the
Northwest Corner.