

BTCE

NEWS Together we can make
life here even better

REGIONAL

Scholarships Provide Pathways to Opportunity

Funds make college more affordable for local students

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

Crystal Wojcik always dreamed of going to college, but she knew that cost would be a barrier. Undeterred, she saved her wages from part-time jobs and applied for the Emma Miller Scholarship in 2017 to assist with her tuition at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. The four-year award followed her through college and helped her graduate debt-free in May.

Crystal decided to stay in the Berkshires and is now the finance director and accountant for her hometown of Adams, where she hopes to inspire young people her age to work in government. "This scholarship helped me move toward my career goal," she said. "I am grateful and humbled to have received such a prestigious honor."

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's regional scholarship program of more than 50 funds awarded nearly \$700,000 this year to students like Crystal who are pursuing their academic and vocational ambitions. This marks a 6.6% increase in scholarships from 2020, thanks to support from generous donors throughout our four counties.

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Message from Leadership



Many people consider this the height of the giving season. Donors of all capacities look outward to do some good, acting on deep feelings of gratitude. A fortunate fact here at Berkshire Taconic is that donors keep giving all year long.

Consider our scholarship program, which grows every year as residents establish new funds to ease the burden of paying for college or vocational school. Our story here features just a few of the students who benefit from these acts of generosity. You'll also read how board member and fund holder Bob Norris and his wife Mary Ann jumpstarted an astonishing community response to hunger among school families just when it mattered most.

As we close yet another year of uncertainty, one thing is clear: we can do more together than any one of us could alone. Serving on an advisory committee, making grants from your donor advised fund, stewarding our investments for future impact, or putting BTCF grant resources into meaningful action as a partner or student—all of it demonstrates the power of community to make life here even better.

We are grateful for all of you, and we send our best wishes for the holidays.




Peter Taylor
President

The Millbrook Early Childhood Education Center received a grant from the Northeast Dutchess Fund to provide scholarship assistance for families of pre-kindergarten students. "We work hard to ensure that early childhood education is accessible to everyone in our community," said Executive Director Anne Garcia, pictured here.

Snapshot





Nonprofit BRIDGE ensured that families in its network received fresh food during the pandemic, with help from grants from our emergency relief fund.

BERKSHIRE COUNTY

Coming Together to Reduce Hunger

Early donor-led efforts helped boost community response

America had uncomfortable truths to face about food insecurity long before the pandemic struck. That may be especially true for rural counties, which have the highest rates of overall food insecurity and children at risk for it, according to Feeding America.

Here in Berkshire County, donor-led projects to tackle these challenges started several years ago with a focus on two barriers: the lack of equipment to store fresh food at distribution sites and a need for better coordination to serve school-age children in the four southern school districts.

In 2018, Berkshire Taconic partnered with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and a private foundation to provide capital grants to food pantries and other sites. Nearly \$100,000 in funding has vastly increased their capacity to accept fruit and vegetables and serve more fresh and healthy food.

One partner, the VFW/American Legion Veterans Food Pantry in Lanesborough, served 47,000 pounds of fresh produce the

following year—one-quarter of its total distribution. Grant-funded equipment opened up precious refrigeration space. “These freezers have saved us time and time again,” staff there said.

Concerned that school-age children and their families lacked sustainable access to fresh food, particularly during vacations and holidays, BTCF donors Bob and Mary Ann Norris made a multi-year gift from their donor advised fund to Fairview Hospital’s Rural Health Network. By funding a new food coordinator position there, they hoped to strengthen existing efforts—such as distributing backpacks full of nonperishable foods—while forming a plan to fill gaps in critical free and reduced lunch programs. That coordinator, Jenny Schwartz, had been on the job three months when schools suddenly closed.

Schwartz quickly began online convenings to build partnerships among the districts and food, farming and frontline organizations that had already been working to understand and confront food access barriers. Subsequent weekly meetings welcomed

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Jenny Schwartz's role as food access coordinator for Fairview Hospital's Rural Health Network is funded by BTCF donors Bob and Mary Ann Norris.



Mary Wheat and her volunteers serve hundreds of families each week at the South Congregational Church food pantry in Pittsfield with support from Berkshire Taconic grants.

“Since we are able to accept more of the harvest, we are being offered more of it. And we are providing far more fruit and vegetables in our daily meals.”

—Berkshire Food Project, which received a grant to purchase food storage equipment

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faith-based leaders, social service providers and local farms. Social justice organization BRIDGE provided the partners critical training on bringing an equity and justice lens to their work.

In the end, several dozen organizations mobilized to feed the school communities who needed them. Schwartz's role temporarily expanded to coordinate a restaurant meal program that ultimately provided meals for close to 600 people each week for nearly three months.

At the same time, BTCF's pandemic relief fund for the county made dozens of food-related grants, including resources to replicate the regional coordination of the south in central and northern parts of Berkshire County. Additional funding from a state-sponsored emergency fund and the private foundation behind the previous round of capital grants expanded the impact of this unprecedented community generosity.

In all, BTCF and its donors and partners have mobilized nearly \$1.5 million in Berkshire County to fight food insecurity over the last three years.

“I think the silver lining is that we created a lot of long-term systems to help families,” Schwartz said recently. “Now, each school is transitioning to a program that best meets the needs.”

She credits the Norrises for identifying an area of need and helping ensure that “someone has eyes on it consistently,” a crucial step for progress that has far surpassed their original goals.

Looking ahead, these committed partners say that equity efforts must continue to be stepped up, and that food sovereignty—which emphasizes ownership of healthy, culturally appropriate and ecologically sound food systems by consumers—is the future. How to build it is the question they will now pursue. ■

To learn more about this work or start your own donor advised fund, contact Kara Mikulich at kmikulich@berkshiretaconic.org or 413.229.0370 ext. 124.

Portraits of Generosity

Celebrating lasting legacies

There are many ways to partner with Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, and the relationships that result have a powerful impact on our region—and our foundation. We lost many dear friends over the last year, so we dedicate this space to celebrating their lasting legacies.



HERBERT BURTIS

Together with his late partner and fellow musician John Ferris, Herb made annual grants to assist high school seniors planning to study classical music. Supporters like Herb have helped make the careers of artists possible and create a future in which the arts thrive.



JUDY KITTREDGE

Judy and her late husband John served their Dalton, Mass., community through philanthropy and dedicated board service. Both played leadership roles for Berkshire Taconic funds that support students and nonprofits in central Berkshire County.



ALICE CORBIN

Giving back was a way of life for Alice Corbin. With her late partner Norma Edsall, she established a donor advised fund to make grants for education, conservation and preservation in their beloved Columbia County.



VIRGINIA STANTON SMITH

In addition to being a trusted attorney, leader in the legal community and BTCF board chair, Ginger was an advocate for the promise and possibilities of philanthropy. As a result of Ginger's initiative and counsel, countless donors have arranged generous planned gifts and permanent resources that will support causes, organizations and communities in the Berkshires forever.



MOE ENGLAND

Starting in 2014, Moe England opened four funds with Berkshire Taconic. In each case, Moe wanted the causes he cared about to benefit from funds that would be invested and grow, now and long into the future. The cause he cared about most was creating opportunities for young people.



JOHN HOYT STOOKEY

John was a successful businessman who launched three nonprofits, such as Berkshire Choral International, served on dozens of boards, including Berkshire Taconic's board from 2007 to 2013, and was a founding board member of the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center and Berkshire South Regional Community Center. He also helped BTCF secure its current home.



SIMONE JOYAUX

In a relationship spanning nearly two decades, Simone and the foundation partnered to build the capacity of organizations around our region. In her inimitable way, she helped BTCF grow as a resource for nonprofits, and nonprofits adopt best practices and become more effective.



Brian Buono, a self-taught folk artist from Chatham, N.Y., received an A.R.T. Fund grant for supplies that were a luxury he could not afford. "It really has been liberating."

REGIONAL

Fund for Artists Grants Millions

One donor's simple idea blossoms into life-changing annual awards

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Artist's Resource Trust (A.R.T.) Fund, which supports mid-career visual artists and arts institutions to commission their work. The fund has awarded nearly 650 grants totaling \$3.3 million to artists with financial need who demonstrate substantial commitment and quality in their work, as well as organizations.

The fund's generous anonymous founder started out wanting to help fellow artists: "I hit a plateau and all my galleries closed. I started to see there were many people in that boat." What began as a welcome offer of financial assistance has evolved into a prestigious, jury-selected award that frees artists across the foundation's four-county region and New England to focus on new ideas.

Sara Farrell Okamura of North Adams, Mass., received one of the first A.R.T. grants, which she used for materials for her painting, drawing and printmaking. A recent second grant will pay for heat and insulation so she can continue her craft all winter. "This fund is such a sensational gift," she said.

Next door in Williamstown, Alyssa Pheobus Mumtaz will use grant money to relaunch her art career following the birth of her children. A practicing Muslim, she produces large-scale paintings and textiles influenced by the philosophy, aesthetics and culture of Islam. She said she is pursuing new projects she "wouldn't have had the courage to do" without this grant.

The impact of these grants ripples throughout the region and beyond. John Belardo of Pine Plains, N.Y., installed a kiln in his studio to expand the size and complexity of his large-scale terra-cotta sculptures. Deborah Chabrian of South Kent, Conn., paid studio expenses to focus on a new series of watercolor paintings for an upcoming solo show—a culmination of her many years as a working artist. Photographer Shaun O'Boyle of Dalton, Mass., traveled to Iceland to capture climate change in the Arctic. Dozens of his photos were recently featured on the Smithsonian magazine's Instagram page.

Arts organizations also benefit. Basilica Hudson in Hudson, N.Y., hosted a free exhibit of Dan McCabe's large-scale photography that explored the natural beauty of the Hudson Valley following a month-long residency to develop the images. The Vermont Studio Center sponsored fellowships for many New England artists. "We couldn't build this amazing creative community without you," staff there said.

Reflecting on the past 25 years, the A.R.T. founder remains clear on the abiding value of art in an unsteady world. "Art wakes us up to see things differently. It is the response to how the world is changing. Art makes people stop, think and see with fresh eyes, and it may change a person's direction." ■

"I am so grateful for this grant. I have created bodies of work that I would not have been able to otherwise. It has already had an impact on my career, and that momentum will continue."

—Chalice Mitchell,
A.R.T. Fund grantee

(Continued from cover)

The majority of these scholarships went to students whose families can contribute \$10,000 or less toward college, and nearly 25% were awarded to recipients whose households were unable to provide any financial support. Our investment in educational attainment is addressing the stubborn opportunity gap for students who aspire to attend college but are unable to afford it.

BTCF's scholarship program continues to grow as residents establish new funds to honor their loved ones and provide pathways toward greater opportunity for young people. Volunteer advisory committees oversee most funds, and their grantmaking gives students "a vote of confidence from the community," said Amy Taylor, our community engagement officer for education.

NORTHEAST DUTCHESS COUNTY

The Northeast Dutchess Scholarship Fund, which was established in 2014 through the support of the Walbridge Fund, awards an annual renewable scholarship to a graduate from one of the four local high schools. This year, Robert Wilder of Stanfordville donated \$140,000 to ensure that seven additional students will receive funding throughout their four years of college. "Education provides the tools, life skills and self-discipline to help kids get better jobs and be better citizens," he said.

Thanks to Wilder's generosity, **Xin Wong** of Millerton is attending Dutchess Community College for accounting, and he enjoys the freedom to step away from the comfort of his home and "start exploring what I really want to learn." Aaminah Syed of Pine Plains plans to launch a fashion design business once she graduates from Marist College, where she is thrilled to "join a diverse community and improve myself through higher education."

COLUMBIA COUNTY

A local resident created the renewable Cha-Nel Scholarship Fund more than 20 years ago to support graduates of high schools in New Lebanon and Chatham. This year, the advisory committee granted \$30,000 to 15 seniors and nine college students. Margot Schassler of Chatham is halfway through her architectural engineering education at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She said her "career path was made possible by the Cha-Nel Scholarship Fund," having joined a worldwide architecture and engineering company as an intern last summer. Chatham's Amara Engel is "exploring and growing" into her own person as she majors in museum studies and minors in both criminal justice and history at Rochester Institute of Technology.

NORTHWEST LITCHFIELD COUNTY

The life-changing Margaret Derwin scholarship is named in memory of a beloved 2005 graduate of Housatonic Valley Regional High School. Each year, a junior there receives up to \$25,000 annually toward college tuition and other costs, and \$5,000 to participate in an overseas community service program. **Taylor Sherwood** of Lakeville graduated in May from Quinnipiac University with a bachelor's degree in accounting thanks to the financial support of the Derwin scholarship. She honed her skills with an internship at Deloitte over the summer, and she is now pursuing her MBA. She hopes to return to the Northwest Corner to "give back to the community" that gave her so much. She said this scholarship "has made what only seemed like a dream turn into a reality."

BERKSHIRE COUNTY

The Rhoda Rubin Memorial Nursing Scholarship Fund helps nontraditional students and adults pursue nursing degrees at Berkshire Community College. This year, the committee awarded seven scholarships totaling \$9,800 thanks to a generous gift from the Cooper Meadow Fund. "I worked hard to get into the competitive nursing program," previous recipient **Caitlin Gelineau** said. "I know my education is the key to success. I get to help people and do what I love."

In southern Berkshire County, the Honorable James P. Dohoney Scholarship Fund has assisted graduating seniors for more than 20 years. The fund honors the legacy of the noted Superior Court judge by aiming to instill in students his ideals of fairness, decency and "service above self." The committee increased its awards to up to \$10,000 to make a meaningful impact on the educational goals of its recipients.

Madison Tinker of North Egremont is studying history at Siena College, and she plans to pursue her Ph.D. "Paying for eight or more years of higher education would not be possible without your generosity and hope," she wrote to the committee. "Your kindness and love will stay within me forever." ■

To learn more about our scholarship program or how to open your own fund, contact Amy Taylor at ataylor@berkshiretaconic.org or 413.229.0370 ext. 107.

ON THE COVER: Crystal Wojcik, recipient of the Emma Miller Scholarship.



Xin Wong



Taylor Sherwood



Caitlin Gelineau



Madison Tinker

Berkshire Taconic

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Regional Roundup

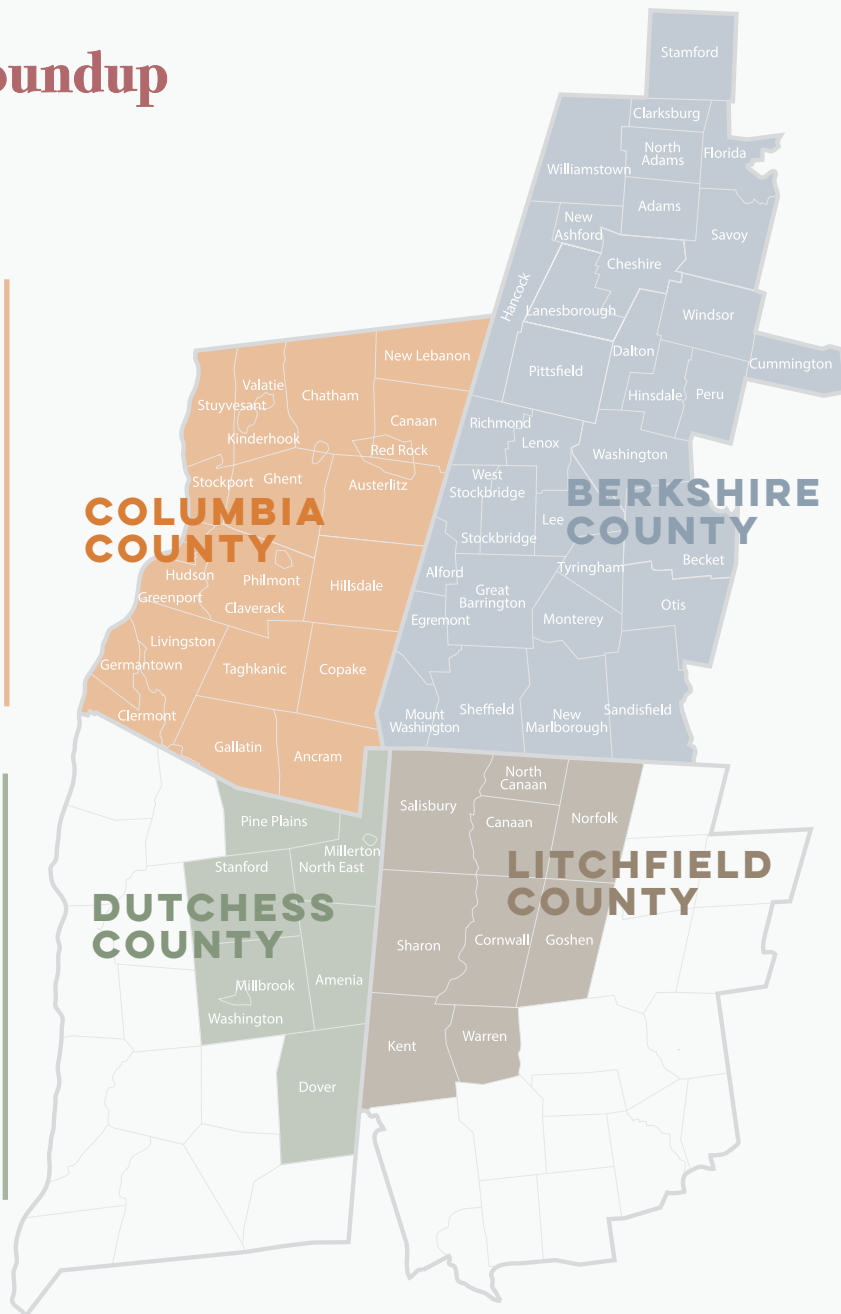
The Fund for Columbia County granted \$85,000 to five organizations for projects that will support high school and college-age youth in making a successful transition from school to work.

Our Talk Read Sing Columbia initiative is entering its fifth year to boost early literacy and encourage lifelong learning.

Since inception, we have awarded nearly \$600,000 to our partners to ensure that more children reach their potential.

Classical pianist Shuhui (Sophia) Zhou of Millbrook received a Martha Boschen Porter Fund grant to work on a live multimedia event in partnership with a visual artist.

The Northeast Dutchess Fund, as part of its NEDCorps 2.0 program, awarded more than \$20,000 to three nonprofits that are developing new programs and expanding services for immigrants living in northeast Dutchess County.



The Major League Baseball Players Trust donated \$5,000 to the Denise Kaley Fund in honor of the late Mark Belanger. The fund supports living expenses of women with cancer.

Our Arts Build Community initiative is supporting 10 local arts and culture organizations as they near completion of a yearlong peer learning program hosted by BRIDGE for leaders committed to equity and inclusion.

Fifteen nonprofits will participate in a six-month program focused on adapting and thriving in the face of challenges, with funding from a foundation collaborative we established to aid rebuilding and recovery in the sector.

A substance abuse prevention program for youth funded by our Northwest Corner Fund since 2017 with local partners has received a five-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to continue this critical work in the Region One School District.