

BTCF

NEWS

Together we can make
life here even better

NORTHEAST DUTCHESS COUNTY

Fund Marks 20 Years of Strengthening Communities

Committee and Partners Focus on Pandemic Relief and Anti-Poverty Push

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

Northeast Dutchess County is home to vibrant village centers, rolling hills and breathtaking valleys. Still, like every region, it faced challenges even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Fortunately, the tight-knit communities here have long histories of supporting their neighbors. One powerful example is the Northeast Dutchess (NED) Fund, which is marking 20 years of improving the quality of life in the area. Since its inception, the fund has awarded nearly \$4 million in grants to vital nonprofits and trusted partners to support innovative projects and services that have touched the lives of countless residents.

Millerton's Wendy Curtis helped make the case for NED during her tenure on Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's board. "Whenever I would describe the foundation to people I would meet, they would ask the same question: 'What do you do locally?'" Wendy said at the time. In response, BTCF formed the Northeast Dutchess Fund, one of eleven area funds that support nonprofits around the foundation's four counties. Wendy joined a group of volunteers on NED's inaugural advisory committee to make grants to community-based nonprofits throughout the region, from libraries and schools to food pantries and arts organizations.

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Message from Leadership



We are pleased to share with you the first issue of BTCF News. In these pages, you will read stories of generosity and service from each of our four counties that demonstrate the lasting impact of philanthropy and trusted partnerships in our own backyards.

We are steadfast in our vision for stronger communities. In addition to the work highlighted here, we awarded more than \$688,000 in scholarships this spring to make college more affordable for students, following a complex year of remote learning and restrictions. This summer, we launched the Bridging Divides, Healing Communities Youth Film Challenge to give young people the chance to tell their stories and share solutions to pressing issues in our region. We are continuing to deliver tailored support to nonprofits as they recover and rebuild from the difficulties of the pandemic.

It is inspiring to live in a beautiful region where neighbors help neighbors—whether during these unprecedented 18 months or the last 20 years, as demonstrated by the work of the Northeast Dutchess Fund on this issue's cover. Together, we can rise to any challenge and emerge stronger.



Peter Taylor
President

Snapshot

The annual Margaret Derwin Scholarship awards \$100,000 to a Housatonic Valley Regional High School junior toward college expenses and \$5,000 to that student and one runner-up for a community service trip. From left, Derwin scholars Maggie Bickford (2020) and Nichole Aguilar (2021), and runners-up Henry Lopez-Gonzalez (2020) and Natalie Wadsworth (2021).



Inclusive Economic Growth

EforAll Helps Local Entrepreneurs Turn Dreams Into Businesses

For three intensive months this past spring, a tight-knit group of 15 local entrepreneurs attended classes, met with volunteer mentors and fine-tuned their business pitches as part of Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll) Berkshire County's third accelerator program. The innovative model helps residents turn their promising ideas into successful businesses and stimulates inclusive economic growth in our communities.

EforAll's staff quickly and successfully shifted to virtual programming due to the pandemic. Participant Brian Barde of Pittsfield called the spring accelerator "absolutely life-changing" during an online cohort celebration, and said it gave him the tools to move forward with Kindlewood Camping, his concierge camping service. Marketing specialists assigned to Brian guided him through the launch of a new website to book clients. "I feel prepared to grow my business and address potential hurdles. I guarantee I am going to apply the knowledge I have gained here for years to come."

EforAll is active in communities in Massachusetts, New York, Colorado and Arkansas. In all of those locations, the nonprofit leverages public-private partnerships for proven economic and social impact. EforAll launched in Berkshire County in October 2019 with support from a group of local funders that committed over \$1 million for its operating budget for three years.

The twice-yearly free business accelerator is the core program of EforAll Berkshire County. "It's a community-wide effort," Executive Director Deborah Gallant said during a webinar. Local volunteers judge applications during the competitive process to join the cohort. Business leaders dedicate their time for weekly meetings with participants, and specialists teach classes on a wide range of topics. Cohort members are eligible to receive funds from a \$20,000 prize pool to help put the skills they have learned into action.

Following 12 weeks of classes, the entrepreneurs continue to receive ongoing support and training for the rest of the year, while gaining a lifelong connection to the growing EforAll network. Mindy Miraglia, who was a member of last year's inaugural class, said during a virtual event that she "feels like part of an entrepreneurial ecosystem." She credits EforAll and her team of "cheerleader" mentors for helping her launch Berkshire Camino, a successful business that offers curated walking tours of the Berkshires. She employs group leaders and guides, and contracts with a part-time bookkeeper. "EforAll is the intersection of the dream and reality," Mindy said. "It gives you the critical guidance to decide if this is a hobby or a business. I had to go through that evaluation quite a number of times. Now I can clearly see that I have a real business."

EforAll also hosts regular pitch contests (known as "Shark Tank" without the teeth) for budding entrepreneurs to share ideas, receive feedback and compete for seed funding during lively presentations in front of a panel of local judges. The diverse winners for one of last year's events were a 10-year-old girl, an entertainer who

"EforAll has given me the opportunity, the knowledge and the skills to start up my business and make sure my dream becomes a reality."

—Samuel Abora
Boras' World, Pittsfield

Clemente Sajquiy participated in the spring EforAll Berkshire County business accelerator. He won \$2,500 during a celebration ceremony and plans to purchase equipment for his business, Green River Property Care.

(Continued from previous page)

promotes the art of drag and a pair of college students, highlighting that this work focuses on the untapped potential of every resident.

Alumni of EforAll programs throughout the country have started over 700 businesses since 2013. An impressive 70 percent of them are still active, which is 8 percentage points above the U.S. average for new businesses. In 2020, these businesses generated over \$43 million in revenue and provided 1,329 jobs. Overall, EforAll startups are 72 percent women-owned; 70 percent owned by residents who are Black, Indigenous and people of color; 39 percent immigrant-owned; and 38 percent owned by residents who were previously unemployed.

EforAll Berkshire County is made possible by a group of partners including Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation; the City of Pittsfield and Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation (PERC); Greylock Federal Credit Union; Mill Town; I Berkshire; the Feigenbaum Foundation, Berkshire Bank Foundation, Callahan Dee Family Foundation and the Shah Family Foundation; Common Capital; and MassDevelopment.

These partnerships continue to support EforAll Berkshire County's upcoming events, which include a fall accelerator class, webinars and workshops. Graduates emphasize that these programs are helping them turn their business dreams into reality. When asked recently to describe EforAll in one word, they responded without hesitation: exceptional; inspiring; transformative. ■

BY THE NUMBERS 2020

83

entrepreneurs

67%

women

64%

earning below
average income
previously

17%

BIPOC
and/or
immigrant

EforAll Berkshire County spring cohort member Luis Hoose specializes in fitness training at LH Fitness in Pittsfield.



A photograph of Pierce Sioussat, CEO of Bioforce USA, smiling in a warehouse setting. He is wearing glasses and a light-colored striped shirt. The background shows tall industrial shelving units filled with various products, including large rolls of material and boxes.

Pierce Sioussat,
CEO of Bioforce
USA, at the
company's
Ghent, N.Y.,
headquarters

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Portrait of Generosity

An early spark to give back lights path for others

Pierce Sioussat fully embraces his commitments to his company and community. A member of the volunteer committee of BTCF's Fund for Columbia County, he sees the fund playing an increasingly critical role on issues like food insecurity, aging and youth development. For him, grantee Perfect Ten, an after-school program, is an exemplar of a nonprofit making a big difference despite being a modest operation. "It has a real impact on the lives of young girls to build confidence and see a path forward," he says.


As CEO of Bioforce USA, a supplier of European natural products located in Ghent, N.Y., he's proud of the company's positive influence on the region and record of helping entry-level employees grow to "achieve real careers." At the height of the pandemic, Bioforce made generous gifts to BTCF funds established to provide one-time cash grants to local small businesses and to make flexible resources quickly available to nonprofits serving residents feeling the greatest impact. The company also provided substantial support and protective equipment to Sharon Hospital, on whose board Pierce was then serving.

Growing up in Cooperstown, N.Y., Pierce imagined a time when he might "continue the tradition of generosity" he saw around him. Once Bioforce became a successful business, he instituted a "10-10-10" program

whereby net income in those percentages goes to shareholders, employees and charitable organizations. Countless contributions later, the company focuses its giving on social services, education and culture. "So that's how I came from growing up in a community where philanthropy was important to where we are today," he concludes. ■

To learn more about the Fund for Columbia County, visit [BerkshireTaconic.org/FCC](https://berkshiretaconic.org/FCC).

"If you want to provide support in an effective way, giving to the Fund for Columbia County is one of the best things you can do."



Housatonic Youth Service Bureau received a Northwest Corner Fund grant to create educational videos that will complement telehealth counseling sessions.

NORTHWEST LITCHFIELD COUNTY

Generosity Envelops the Northwest Corner

Grants focus on kids, struggling neighbors and inequities

With several dozen funds dedicated to making life better in the Northwest Corner, annual grantmaking here supports nonprofits of every mission, and residents chasing artistic and educational dreams or seeking aid at moments of crisis. Recent grants have responded to the fallout from the previous 18 months, including loss of income, mental health challenges for students, and reckoning with social divides and inequities. Here's a look at just a few of the ways that the generosity of area donors has been put into meaningful action in the nine Litchfield County towns BTCF serves.

In 2020, BTCF and its Northwest Corner Fund established the Northwest Corner COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, which awarded more than 30 grants totaling nearly \$80,000 to local nonprofits to help them keep their doors open, meet the needs of vulnerable residents and achieve their missions. In the spring of 2021, the Northwest Corner Fund granted an additional \$23,000 to nine organizations for general operating and programming support. Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation—our partner in this work—has matched every grant since the pandemic began, doubling the amount these organizations received.

One repeat grantee is Housatonic Youth Service Bureau. Executive Director Kelly Parker says that demand for the organization's counseling services has exploded to the point that it has had to create a first-ever wait list. She says anxiety about the hybrid school year, the virus and the vaccine, and the impact of isolation and reentry into school communities are

among the most common concerns. One bright spot is the successful transition to telehealth. "We have all decided we will continue to offer these services indefinitely," she says. "In the Northwest Corner, where transportation is an issue, telehealth has eliminated a barrier to access."

Meanwhile, BTCF's Neighbor-to-Neighbor Fund has awarded nearly \$90,000 to individuals and families facing financial distress due to the pandemic. These grants increased by 235% over 2019, demonstrating the overwhelming need for this support. Social workers use this emergency funding to help residents pay costs related to housing, utilities, transportation, food and health.

Finally, six creative projects received grants from BTCF's Bridging Divides, Healing Communities initiative, which launched in November 2020 with the goal of bringing together people with different experiences and points of view to repair and strengthen relationships. In one project, the social justice team of the Church of Christ Congregational, staff at the Norfolk Historical Society and Salisbury School students joined forces to create a day of celebration and a permanent witness stone honoring James Mars, the last enslaved person bought and sold in Connecticut. Others explored topics such as immigration, identity and health disparities through public programming and trainings. ■

"I can't thank you enough for helping me through these difficult times. It's quite possible I'd be homeless again without your help and support. Your assistance has kept me alive."

—Neighbor-to-Neighbor grant recipient

The Northeast Dutchess Fund has awarded multiple grants to Amenia's free dance and theater program over the years.



Grace Immigrant Outreach, led by Evelyn Garzetta, helps residents access resources to meet basic needs and avert emergencies as part of the NEDCorps program.



(Continued from cover)

Donors have made NED's work possible for two decades. The fund's creation is in large part due to the inspiring generosity of the Walbridge Fund and the Carson Family Charitable Trust. Judy and Russ Carson, who live part-time in Millbrook, have been instrumental in building the fund's endowment, starting with a \$100,000 challenge grant to ensure lasting support for its mission.

The Carsons also supported the launch of the fund's NEDCorps program. For more than a decade, this initiative has helped over 2,000 individuals and families access resources to avert emergencies and meet basic needs. They have gotten guidance from local social workers at multiple partner organizations over the years, such as North East Community Center, Grace Immigrant Outreach and the Community Action Partnership for Dutchess County. NEDCorps recently expanded to support the region's growing immigrant community and focus on the critical transition from school to work for high school students.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, NED shifted its focus last year to assist nonprofits and neighbors in crisis. It awarded nearly \$250,000 to local organizations in 2020 to help them maintain effective programs, and raised close to \$90,000 for BTCF's Neighbor-to-Neighbor Fund to pay for housing, utilities and other mounting costs. Thanks to a significant anonymous gift, the fund is also distributing more than \$200,000 in cash cards through its nonprofit network to bring immediate

relief to residents facing extreme financial hardship, including those who may not be eligible for government assistance.

The Food of Life/Comida de Vida Pantry at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Amenia Union received multiple grants last year to expand its services. "We grew from serving 35 to 157 families, many of whom had never sought assistance before," the Rev. AJ Stack said. "A significant portion of the population does not have access to groceries or needs to drive long distances to the closest affordable markets. Our mission, made possible by the fund's continued support, is to fill that gap."

Moving forward, NED will maintain focus on the well-being of nonprofits and neighbors. Recently, the committee awarded nearly \$150,000 to 23 organizations, many of which are still recovering from the pandemic. "For the last 20 years, NED has worked tirelessly to invest in the people, places and projects of this community. This past year taught us that the work of strengthening and supporting nonprofits is more important than ever," NED Committee Chair Sarah Stack said. "We are looking forward to the next 20 years of strengthening our communities in this beautiful corner of the county." ■

COVER PHOTO: Rock Steady Farm in Millerton received a Northeast Dutchess Fund grant last year to provide vegetable shares for families facing financial hardship.

NORTHEAST DUTCHESS FUND AT A GLANCE

2001 year
est.

\$3,000 first grant for
after-school
programs

nearly
\$4M total grants
in 20 years

Advisory Committee: Sarah Stack (Chair), Annemarie Abrams, Diana Bontecou, Gloria Callen, Wendy Curtis, Deban Flexner, Nancy Hathaway, Daphne Richards, Nancy Stahl

Areas Served: Amenia, Clinton Corners, Dover Plains, Millbrook, Millerton, North East, Pine Plains, Stanford, Washington, Wassaic and Wingdale

Berkshire Taconic COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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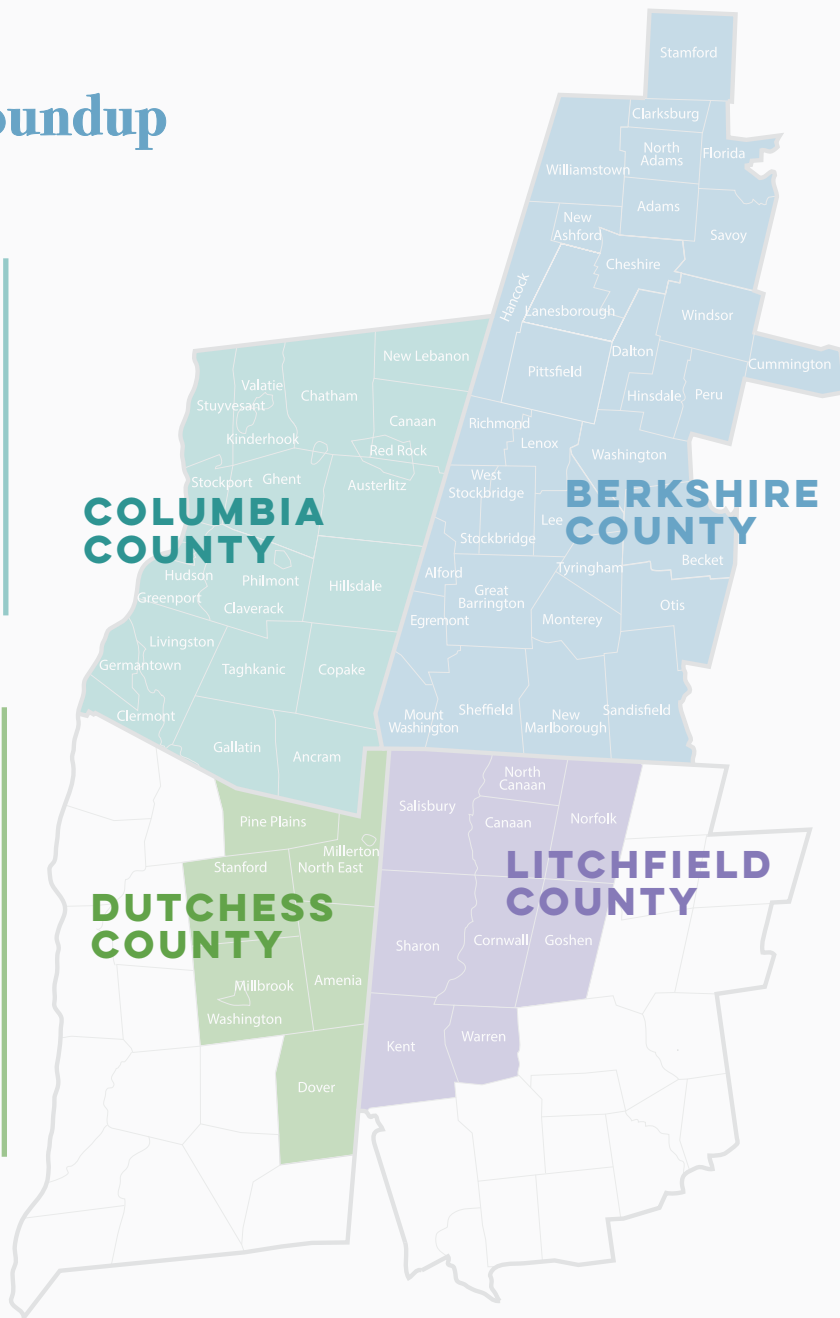
Regional Roundup

The Fund for Columbia County granted more than \$83,000 to 21 nonprofits, including nearly \$20,000 for programs that benefit the growing senior population.

Ackneil M. Muldrow, III joined our board in June. He is a partner in the private equity practice at Weil, Gotshal & Manges and lives part-time in Columbia County.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County and Grace Immigrant Outreach have partnered to offer a free 4-H summer camp for the children of immigrants, with a \$10,000 grant from the Northeast Dutchess Fund's NEDCorps program.

Daisy Matus of Millerton, a graduate of Webutuck High School, received a renewable \$5,000 award from the Northeast Dutchess Scholarship Fund to attend Rochester Institute of Technology.



BTCF and its partners on the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County awarded \$182,000 for projects addressing mental health and food needs.

Bryan E. House of Housatonic joined our board in June. Active on many boards and task forces, he is director of community outreach and engagement with the Berkshire County District Attorney's Office.

The Jane Lloyd Fund is raising funds for cancer patients at TheJaneLloydFund.org following the cancellation of its clambake.

The Friends of Beckley Furnace Fund, which works to preserve sites on the Northwest Connecticut Iron Heritage Trail, marks its 20th anniversary this year.