

Rochester Area Foundation responds to new challenges

Post-Bulletin

12/27/2008

By Steve Thornton and Michael McNeil

Rochester is fortunate to have a vital, resilient local economy. In the midst of the global economic downturn, Rochester and the surrounding communities are faring better than most.

However, the current economic situation is having its impact on our community. Requests for basic needs have increased. At the same time, likely federal, state, and local budget cuts will mean fewer resources for some of the organizations and agencies responsible for providing these very services. In light of these facts, the Rochester Area Foundation will be temporarily adjusting its grant-making priorities in 2009.

Throughout its history, the Rochester Area Foundation has endeavored to identify and address unmet needs in the Rochester area. The foundation's regular grants process was designed to help create some of the dynamic programs and organizations that the community now looks to for support as we move through these difficult times.

In an effort to address the increasing demands on those organizations serving the most basic needs of the community, the Rochester Area Foundation will make the following three changes.

First, the Foundation will temporarily prioritize grants to services and organizations providing basic needs -- food, shelter, clothing and related services.

Second, the Foundation will concentrate on funding existing programs that will have immediate increased impact--rather than its usual preference for seeding start-up ideas and programs which may take years to build to scale.

And third, the Foundation will suspend any new capital campaign funding in order to focus funding on the community's immediate needs.

As the Rochester Area Foundation enters its 65th year, it remains dedicated to improving the community's vitality. Since its creation in 1944, when Harry J. Harwick brought together a group of local community leaders to create "a vehicle for the sound financial management of funds contributed and dedicated to the public welfare," individuals, families and businesses have made generous gifts of all sizes to the Foundation in order to make Rochester and the surrounding area a vibrant and dynamic place to live, work and play.

As a community, we can be grateful that the selfless philanthropy of generations of donors is preserved in the endowment of the Rochester Area Foundation. Those accumulated years of generous donations are now able to help those most in need in these extraordinarily tough economic times. On behalf of the entire community, we thank you for your generous support.

Michael McNeil is chair and Steve Thornton is executive director of the Rochester Area Foundation Board of Trustees.