

David's Letter - 2015

“This special place nurtures greatness.”

The energy and spirit that is so contagious in West Michigan is attracting bright, talented, young next gen who are eager to be part of the vitality and sense of self-confidence that is evident in the markets we serve. They share our pride of place. Their creative and sometimes non-traditional ideas are welcomed and embraced, changing the conversation by offering eye-popping solutions to some of our most pressing challenges and our unfulfilled opportunities.

Just look around and you'll see plenty of tangible signs of confidence in the economic, educational, medical, cultural and entertainment future of this amazing place. The scale of philanthropic resources relative to the demographics is one of the distinguishing characteristics that allow us to achieve remarkable outcomes. A significant number of individuals, families, corporations and foundations are engaged in strategic philanthropy. Much of their focus is on the cluster of communities that make up the West Michigan Region which have a unique sense of shared history and passionate commitment to a collective future.

Collaboration, collegiality, and cohesiveness are the norm and a cultural attribute seldom found elsewhere. It is why and how we have accomplished so much, for so many, for so long, and why the trends in the communities we support are so positive.

As a collaborative funder, the Frey Foundation values its strong and independent partnerships. For example, our trustees were delighted to partner with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to jump start community foundations in Charlevoix and Petoskey-Harbor Springs in the early 1990s. Today, both foundations are firmly established, wisely governed and proudly endorsed by broad segments of their communities. It is a philanthropic partnership model that was enormously successful and should be replicated at every opportunity.

We continue to view governance, investment policies, staff structure and grantmaking through a business lens: grow the endowment after grants and expenses and maintain a lean and focused staff where teamwork is applauded and rewarded. Great grants are the Frey Foundation's legacy. Bold, creative, game-changing grants are our primary mission. We view grants as “investments,” not just as donations or gifts. We expect our grantees to be prudent and professional managers and their boards to be actively engaged in oversight, providing enlightened governance.

Michigan is attracting exceptional people with unique talents, and the state will continue to blossom and evolve as a shining star and leader of the upper industrial Midwest and beyond. Its increasingly balanced economy will be led by a workforce that is motivated, dependable and educated.....with sturdy determination! We're pleased to be firmly rooted right in the heart of it all! The future for the wolverine state is indeed bright.