

[Home](#) > [Community](#) > [Empowering Locals to Give Back](#)

COMMUNITY ♦ THE GREATER GOOD

Empowering Locals to Give Back

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CAPTION PHOTO ABOVE: HUDSON VALLEY SEED. COURTESY OF MEGHAN SPIRO

Providing generous people with a savvy strategy for making a difference

By Jacqueline Lieske, *Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley*

FOR THOSE OF US lucky enough to live in the Hudson Valley, the sense of community is palpable and ever-present. The essence of this is a commitment to coming together for the benefit of all. Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley draws on that sensibility to empower local people to give back.

Founded in 1969, the Community Foundations is a public grantmaking organization whose central mission is to improve lives in the region. They do this by offering tax-smart ways for donors to make an impact, supporting nonprofits with grants and technical expertise and convening the community on pressing challenges.

“We work at the intersections of philanthropy,” said Nevill Smythe, Interim President and CEO of the Community Foundations. “Whether we are helping a donor achieve their charitable goals, bringing agencies and government entities to the table on an issue or helping a nonprofit craft a grant request—our efforts aim to connect the high aspirations of our partners with the greatest outcomes for all.”

To date, those outcomes include more than \$51 million in grants to the region, \$5 million in scholarships for students, \$2.5 million invested in connecting farm-fresh food to those who need it and at least eight (confirmed) lives saved through health and human services grantmaking.

“This year we are especially mindful of our history, along with the dedication of volunteers and donors in the wellbeing of our community,” Smythe said. “With reverence for the past, we are equally focused on the future. We reached this milestone because our work is both timeless and timely. For instance, with recent tax-law change the role in the community has changed yet again—to provide generous people with a savvy strategy for making a difference.”

Smythe is referencing the fastest-growing area of the organization and, in fact, American giving: donor-advised funds. He notes that these funds function as a charitable checkbook. They allow donors to give a large sum up front and then use the balance to make distributions to organizations of their choosing. This strategy of “bunching” has been lauded by tax professionals, along with the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*. In light of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs



Act, the number of donor-advised funds held by the Foundations has grown 29 percent. The result of this is an increase from \$3 million in annual grantmaking to more than \$15 million last year.

This ability to pivot in response to the needs of the community is a hallmark of the organization. What started as a group of civic-minded business leaders has evolved into a network of hundreds of volunteers serving on boards and committees, nonprofit partners who address emerging needs and caring people who give to causes that matter.



CAPTION PHOTO: CLEARWATER CLIMBING. COURTESY OF GE

BERLINER

The Community Foundations will celebrate its anniversary at the Mashomack Preserve in Pine Plains, NY, on Sunday, September 22. The Garden Party will feature locally sourced and prepared foods from Farmers & Chefs catering, along with local wines, beers and sparkling beverages. Proceeds from the event will awarded to strengthen the work of local nonprofits. You can learn more and reserve your ticket today on the [Community Foundations website](#). ■

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