



September 2019

## From Mary's Desk

Partner. Community. Neighbor.

We each have our own interpretation of these words. For some, these words are nouns. For others, these words are verbs. No matter how you think of these words from a grammatical perspective, you know the underlying meaning. You may even physically identify with these feelings - by feeling them in your bones. We are all connected somehow and working together produces far better results than any of us working alone.



Recently, I was reminded how connected we are.

As our team travels across our great state (5000 miles in August), we find connections that reinforce how we're all in this together. For years, MCF has partnered with Montana State University Extension in strengthening communities through community foundations and we are happy to continue strengthening that partnership. Our new partnership with the Center for Disaster Philanthropy and the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies has enabled us to deepen our existing partnerships in communities to help communities think and recover differently from disaster.

Spending the day with 100 of my closest Montana friends at reImagining Rural reinforced to me our connectedness and our opportunity to think differently about what rural means and how rural is changing. There's a bright future ahead. How we work together in a period of rapid change will be critical for our individual and collective well-being. I'm grateful to live in a place where we show up for each other and we care about the future.

Sincerely,



Mary K. Rutherford  
President & CEO

## Over 100 People Convene to reImagine the Rural Narrative

Empty storefronts on main street, low school enrollment, a departure from our visions of the small towns of our youth...

These are just some of the challenges that face small towns in Montana and inspired Montana Community Foundation (MCF) to partner with MSU Extension and the Governor's office to host *reImagining Rural*, a state-wide gathering focused on the future of rural communities.

On September 10, a group of over 100 people, representing organizations and local community foundations around the state, came together at the Barnsion in Harlowton in an effort to connect on this important topic.

MCF Staff



Tara Mastel, Ben Winchester,  
Mary Rutherford

The day-long conference began with a keynote address by noted expert on rural trends, [Ben Winchester](#), from the University of Minnesota Extension's Center for Community Vitality. During his talk, Ben shared the surprisingly positive demographic trends he has uncovered in the 20 years he has been studying rural communities, undermining the notion that small towns are dying.

Ben shared research that shows that small towns are just changing in the same ways larger communities are. Ben argues that these changes are due to world-wide trends beyond local control, often characterized as "globalization". Though change is happening everywhere, the changes are more evident in our small towns because of the smaller scale.

"Yes, hardware stores are closing in rural communities, but they are also closing in big cities. It just isn't as evident because, in big cities, there are other hardware stores just a few more blocks away," said Winchester.

Many in the audience were surprised to hear Ben's "[Brain Gain](#)" research, which shows that nearly every rural county and reservation in the country has had a decades-long pattern gain of people in their 30's and 40's, indicating that individuals are moving back to rural areas "with college degrees, work experience, professional contacts, and children".

Beyond demographic trends, Ben argued that rural communities have a vital civic life as measured by the growth of the number of nonprofit organizations in rural Montana and across much of the nation's rural counties. These nonprofit organizations can be vehicles for long-term financial investment that stays with the community.

To help rural communities thrive, Ben urged the audience to change the negative narrative we have regarding our rural communities and focus on helping newcomers feel welcome.

Conference organizers are compiling the feedback received from the event in hopes to continue the conversation about the future of our rural communities.

In addition to the day-long conference, MCF co-sponsored a talk by Winchester the evening prior to the conference on the campus of MSU in partnership with the President's office, Extension and the Office for Research and Economic Development at MSU.

## **Disaster Philanthropy Matters**

September is [National Preparedness Month](#), a time to encourage and remind Americans to be prepared for disasters or emergencies in their homes, businesses, and communities.

The Montana Community Foundation is helping our local community foundation affiliate and affiliate partners be prepared for disaster this month by sharing the Community Disaster Preparedness Toolkit, a series of questions and prompts designed to help community foundations identify their role during and after a disaster.

Through the support of the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, and The Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, we were able to create the Community Disaster Preparedness Toolkit and provide the Next Steps Grant to support our Affiliate and Affiliate Partners. The Next Steps Grant enables MCF to make \$25,000 in grants across participating community foundations.

MCF staff has logged over 5,000 miles throughout the state this month for visits with our Affiliates and Partner affiliates to discuss the toolkit. The community foundations that choose to complete the toolkit will then

be eligible to receive funding from the grant.

MCF initially became involved in disaster philanthropy during the 2017 wildfire season and is dedicated to helping community foundations understand the important role they serve during a disaster. You can help Montana be ready for disaster by giving to our [Disaster Relief Fund](#).

## 10 Questions for Staff- Erika Rasumussen

Who are the people that spend their days working for Montana's future? Let's find out!

### Where are you from originally (city and state)?

Menlo Park, California

### What's your position at MCF and what do you do?

AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer - I will be working with the Women's Foundation of Montana to build capacity in their PowerHouse Montana program.



### What did you do prior to joining MCF?

I had been running my family's "Open-Air European Market" since I graduated from college, up until this past June, when we brought our business to a close after 45 years.

### Do you have any educational degrees and/or professional certifications, etc.?

I have my B.A. from Oberlin College in East Asian Studies, with a concentration in Chinese Language and Philosophy, and a minor in Chemistry.

### What's your favorite hobby/what do you do with your free time?

My favorite hobby is indoor rock climbing! I also enjoy fixing bicycles and playing guitar and piano.

### What are three things you can't live without?

Coffee, nature, and puzzles!

### How did you first get involved in the nonprofit sector?

This is my first jump into the nonprofit world! I'm so excited to be a part of such an incredible organization that does so much good for Montana!

### What's your favorite place in Montana?

I haven't been to very many places in Montana yet, but the Beartooth Mountains area was one of the most stunning views I've seen in my life.

### What's your favorite thing about Montana/Montanans?

Everyone has been so friendly and kind!

## Generosity at Work

In July, we awarded nearly \$500,000 to 187 recipients for the 2019-2020 academic year, thanks to the generous scholarship funds established by our donors. THANK YOU!

### **Scholarship Highlight:**

Great Falls High School "Class of '51" Scholarship Fund

In 1951, a group of 278 individuals graduated from Great Falls High School with a whole future ahead of them. Today that same group is helping students pursue their dreams.

The Great Falls High School "Class of '51" Scholarship Fund was started as an endowment in 1996 by members of the GFHS Class of 1951 as a way to financially support Great Falls High School graduates in their pursuit of education. The first scholarship was awarded in 2001 and, since then, 20 students have received scholarships, totaling \$47,193. The scholarship amount has ranged from \$2,500-3,500.

This year's \$3,500 scholarship was awarded to Erin Watt, now a student at the University of Montana-Western, with hopes of becoming a renowned author.

Students are selected based on financial need, participation in school and community activities, going to a college or university in Montana, and a written application stating their long term goals and objectives.

In 1988 the Montana Community Foundation's (MCF) first scholarship was created and 29 years later, MCF has 43 active scholarships available for our Montana students. [Learn more about how you can help students achieve their dreams through a scholarship.](#)

### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

The application period for [scholarships](#) for the 2020-2021 academic year opens on January 1.

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Montana Community Foundation, 33 S Last Chance Gulch, Ste 2A, Helena, MT 59601

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