



Iowa Area Development Group Community Foundation

Using the care and concern of ordinary citizens to build communities

By Margaret Ludington

When people collaborate, things can happen. That's the philosophy of the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) Community Foundation. The foundation is the philanthropic arm of the IADG. Their mission is to provide economic development and community betterment through funding research, education and training, and community-based and guided philanthropy.

The IADG has helped with economic development in rural Iowa since the 1980s when Iowa's rural electric cooperatives saw a need to respond to the farm crisis. Over time, the IADG recognized something was missing.

"In our state's nonmetro and rural areas, community foundations were almost nonexistent," IADG president and foundation CEO Rand Fisher says. "To our organization, this just didn't seem right."

IADG formed the community foundation in 2003. They joined with the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines to form the Iowa Community Affiliate Network (IOWA C.A.N.). Thirty Iowa counties have joined IOWA C.A.N. and over 150 funds have been established in those counties. The state passed a law allowing community foundations in non-gaming counties to receive a percentage of state gaming money.



Rand Fisher is president of Iowa Area Development and CEO of the Iowa Area Development Foundation.

Fisher says community foundations build endowments to allow for long-term planning in community development. Until the IADG Community Foundation and IOWA C.A.N. arrived, local projects like building libraries, expanding trail systems, and purchasing emergency rescue equipment relied on one-time grants and individual donations.

"A foundation creates an endowment for the future," Fisher says. "They don't spend the principle. They spend the interest and earnings."

The IADG has helped with economic development in rural Iowa since the 1980s.

IADG Community Foundation uses the revenues from its endowment to make between \$20,000 and \$25,000 in grants each year. Most of that money goes toward philanthropy education, research, entrepreneurship, and leadership development. They've also contributed to rebuilding the

Little Sioux Boy Scout Camp after a deadly tornado and to AmerIowa C.A.N. Red Cross for eastern Iowa flood relief.

Fisher considers the grants to date as modest contributions of a foundation still in its infancy. He looks forward to a future of increased giving.

The community foundations the IADG Community Foundation works with put their money into arts and culture, education, historical preservation, public safety, and more. Libraries expand collections. Fire departments purchase ambulances and Jaws of Life. Food banks better serve their clients.

Throughout its history, the organization has partnered with the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, benefiting from their size and scale, their professionalism, and their investment portfolio.

Running a foundation is complex and demanding. Tapping into the expertise of a well-established foundation to navigate the intricate policies and practices of creating a nonprofit allows local foundations to focus on their goal of community betterment.

"Working in partnership with a well-established entity like the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines has helped us bring value to rural communities and partners throughout the state," Fisher says.

The IADG Community Foundation sees community foundations as agents of change in rural Iowa.

"We're not only proud of what we've accomplished," Fisher says, "we're even more proud of who we help and what they accomplish for themselves."