

Richland County Foundation has new leadership

Brady Groves has retired as president of the **Richland County Foundation** after serving 13 years in that position. The RCF Board of Trustees named Allie Watson as the incoming President & CEO at the organization.

By leading the Foundation to transition from responsive to proactive grantmaking, Groves showed the community how philanthropy can support organizations and communities alike.

“Brady has been an exemplary leader, steering the Foundation through a transformative era,” said RCF Board of Trustees Chair Chris Hiner.

High impact projects led by Groves included the creation of the Osborne Meese Academy, Richland Gives, an economic development strategy, and the Mansfield Rising Plan.

“I was fortunate to have worked with staff and a board who were open to re-imagining the ways we could impact the community. The success of these lofty ideas was realized only through the steadfast commitment of community partners with a shared vision of wanting to improve the lives of people in Richland County,” said Groves.

The Foundation invested \$1.5 million in a transformative 7-year economic development strategy. The plan called “Richland Partnership” included: the centralization of business retention and expansion and workforce development at the Richland Community Development Group, a scale-up program to identify and target services to area companies to address specific challenges and catalyze growth, the empowerment of existing organizations to promote entrepreneurship and related services, and a community website to track successes and growth.

During the pandemic, Groves created an opportunity for nonprofit directors to come together and brainstorm ways that organizations could support the citizens of Richland County. Funding was distributed quickly with all parties at the table able to contribute opinions.

Watson became president on April 16.

“We believe that Allie’s leadership will not only sustain but elevate the Foundation’s mission. She brings a wealth of knowledge and a deep understanding of the community,” said Hiner.

Watson has been with the Foundation since 2012 facilitating grants and supporting nonprofit organizations as the Senior Community



Richland County Foundation Past President Brady Groves, Foundation Board of Trustees Chair Chris Hiner and Richland County Foundation President Allie Watson

Investment Officer. Watson helped to create the Osborne Meese Academy, a capacity building workshop for nonprofit organizations and Mansfield Rising, an investment plan for the Central Business District. Successes of the plan include upgrades to the city’s main thoroughfares, a community branding campaign, creation of public art, facade improvements to downtown businesses, free public Wi-Fi, and free outdoor movies.

“I am excited to lead such an exceptional organization that contributes in a significant way to the betterment of our community. In every corner of our county, RCF has touched individuals, neighborhoods, and communities in some way,” said Watson.

Watson is a native of Mansfield and has a strong commitment to the Foundation’s mission which is to improve the quality of life in Richland County through strategic philanthropy and community leadership.

Watson graduated from St. Peter’s High School. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Ohio Wesleyan University and a Master of Science degree from Mount Vernon Nazarene University.



Bobby Rhea

Foundation welcomes a new community investment officer

Bobby Rhea has been named the community investment officer at the Richland County Foundation.

“The community investment officer is the Foundation’s liaison to the nonprofits in the community. It is a vital role at the Foundation, and we are excited to have Bobby join our team,” said Foundation President & CEO Allie Watson.

Rhea most recently was employed as the community engagement manager at the Renaissance Theatre. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Mount Vernon Nazarene University and is a graduate of Crestview Local Schools.

Rhea will work alongside Siera Marth-May as she steps into the position of senior community investment officer. Marth-May has been the community investment officer since she joined the Foundation in December 2018. She is a graduate of Clear Fork High School and earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the Ohio State University.

“Over the past five years, Siera has grown the impact we’ve been able to make with both college and career technical education scholarships and has led the Nonprofit Director’s Alliance,” said Watson.



Donors support youth music education

The Renaissance Performing Arts Association recently established two funds to support youth music education: **the Adlyn and Daniel Lichtenstein Youth Orchestra Fund and the Percy Hall Youth Orchestra Fund.**

Renaissance Performing Arts Association President Chelsie Thompson said the funds will provide resources for a new program that utilizes Mansfield Symphony Orchestra musicians who are enrolled at either the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, or the Cleveland Institute of Music to teach area high school students.

“It is an integrated approach; it will provide students with access to quality teachers. And the teachers will gain instruction knowledge while earning a stipend,” said Thompson.

The new funds will also provide scholarships to the younger musicians for private lessons. The Youth Symphony Orchestra draws students from 12 counties. Locally, Mansfield and Lexington school districts have orchestras.

The Lichtenstein and Hall families were friends and musicians.

Adlyn Lichtenstein was a graduate of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York where she majored in concert piano. She performed as a concert pianist until she and Dan began raising a family but continued to work as the Mansfield Symphony rehearsal accompanist and organist until her death in 1978. She served on the Board of Directors of the Mansfield Symphony Society and loved rehearsing piano pieces with the Symphony before the invited soloists arrived in town for their scheduled guest performances. She and Dan especially enjoyed hosting and helping soloists during their stay in Mansfield. Dan never possessed any aptitude for musical performance, but appreciated the important role that the arts, and particularly the Symphony, play in strengthening the cultural and social vitality of the community. He was a Trustee of the Symphony and, as Board Chair, signed the contract that moved

the Symphony’s home from Malabar High School to the Renaissance Performing Arts Center.

An icon in the Ohio music scene for over 65 years, Percy Hall touched thousands of lives during his time as a public-school band, orchestra, and choral director in the greater Mansfield area, first in the Madison School System, and then for 35 years at Mansfield Senior High School. He also served for years as the supervisor of music for Mansfield City Schools. After his retirement from public school teaching, he taught for 10 years as an adjunct music professor at Ashland University, helping to prepare the next generation of music educators. He was a composer and a prolific arranger of countless pieces for band, orchestra, and ensembles - many of which have been published. He was a member of the Mansfield Symphony, a conductor of the Mansfield Youth Strings, assistant conductor of the Mansfield Youth Symphony, and he coordinated and directed school outreach programs and summer public concert series across North Central Ohio.

“It is exciting to have youth music education supported this way by passionate donors. This program will add prestige to our symphony and youth symphony,” said Thompson.

Learn more about the Youth Symphony Orchestra at rentickets.org.

Anyone can donate to these funds; go to richlandcountyfoundation.org, click the donate button and select the fund from the drop-down box or write a check payable to the Richland County Foundation and note the fund on the memo line.



Steven and Christine Myers and their daughters Lizzy and Makayla in Rome.

Paying it forward one wish at a time

Steven and Christine Myers created the Visual Bucket List Foundation to provide experiences for children who have a visual impairment diagnosis. These opportunities are intended to be a special visual memory to be remembered for the rest of their lives when their vision fails. Each wish is unique based on a child's visual bucket list and their capabilities.

Their daughter, Lizzy, was diagnosed at the age of five with Usher Syndrome 2A. Usher Syndrome is the leading cause of deaf blindness. When they received the diagnosis, they created a visual bucket list for Lizzy.

Lizzy was granted a trip to Istanbul and Rome where she was blessed by Pope Francis

and given a once-in-a-lifetime trip. The gift was so grand, that Christine and Steven felt compelled to pass along their gift to whatever extent they could and provide lasting memories for children in a similar position as their daughter.

Since its inception, the VBLF has raised over \$335,000 and has granted 15 wishes. The wishes have ranged from night flights to view Christmas lights from the sky over Mansfield to a real dinosaur dig in South Dakota.

Recently, the VBLF Board of Directors decided to set up an endowed fund at the Foundation.

Steven said the new fund will provide the organization with a diversified revenue stream. Currently they rely on donations and fundraisers to pay for the children's wishes. Christine and Steven have organized many fundraisers over the past eight years including Purse Bingo and Dining in the Dark.

"We trust the Foundation with our investment in an endowed fund," said Steven.

"We will utilize the fund as a building block to help us grow. My hope is to become an international organization helping families from around the world."

Steven and Christine credited RCF President Brady Groves with their early success because he provided support and advice. The Foundation continues to support VBLF and other nonprofits through the Osborne Meese Academy, a nonprofit capacity building program, and Richland Gives, an online giving event.

This year, VBLF hired its first paid employee, Holly Dawson. She is the Director of Community Relations and Marketing. She most recently worked for Junior Achievement and held various roles, including Program Manager, Senior District Manager, Area Director, Development Officer, and Director of Development.

To learn more about the Visual Bucket List Foundation go to <https://thevblf.com/>

Anyone can donate to the VBLF fund; go to richlandcountyfoundation.org, click the donate button and select the fund from the drop-down box or write a check payable to the Richland County Foundation and note the fund on the memo line.

A philanthropic family



Katie, Leah, Kristine, and Todd Lindeman

Todd and Kristine Lindeman want to use their newly created donor advised fund at the Richland County Foundation to help improve the community.

"Philanthropy is part of our family DNA. Our daughters, Katie, and Leah, hear us talking about giving back. It will be exciting to get them involved in the decision making process."

Donor advised funds are convenient, flexible tools for individuals, families, or businesses that want to be personally involved in suggesting grant awards made possible by their gifts.

Todd and Kristine own Alumni Roofing Company Inc, a commercial/industrial roofing company that has been serving the region for 25 years. Todd has worked in the construction industry since graduating high school.

"We need to be able to attract qualified employees. Being able to assist organizations that are educating and supporting our skilled trades workforce is important to us. The fund will give us a way to give back to an industry that has been very good to us," said Todd.

Kristine has been involved at the Foundation for several years.

She was instrumental in establishing the Compassion in Action Fund at the Foundation when the nonprofit board decided to sunset the organization. They felt a fund at the Foundation could continue to execute the goals of the nonprofit through grants. Compassion in Action started in 2012 to help a Clear Fork School family with medical bills. After that, the nonprofit hosted several more benefits to help families in similar situations.

She was a member of the Women's Fund for six years and served as Chairwoman. The mission of the Women's Fund is to empower women and girls. During her tenure she helped lead a childcare initiative to improve the quality of childcare in the county and make it affordable and accessible. She also played an integral role in an endowment campaign to raise money to take the fund over the two-million-dollar mark. She remains a strong advocate for the Women's Fund as an ex-officio member.

"Our philosophy is to leave it better than we found it," said Kristine.

"We have enjoyed getting to know the Foundation and what it does, and we trust the organization," said Kristine.

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Mansfield Richland County Public Library Winnie Greer Fund

An estate gift motivated the Mansfield Richland County Public Library to establish an agency endowed fund at the Richland County Foundation.

"We were very excited to receive an unexpected windfall from the estate of Gerald Davis to set up a fund to honor Winnie Greer," said MRCPL Deputy Fiscal Officer Mary Dwyer.

The fund will help support programs and projects at the library.

"This new fund opens an avenue for donors to support the library either today with a gift or tomorrow in their estate plan," said MRCPL Director Chris May.

Benefits of an Endowed Fund for the Library:

It generates an ongoing source of income and diversifies revenue.

Allows for program expansion.

Encourages gifts.



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RichlandCountyFoundation.org

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About the Mansfield Richland County Public Library:



Mansfield Richland County Public Library Director Chris May and Deputy Fiscal Officer Mary Dwyer

Since its opening in 1889, the first 700 books, and the first set of the Congressional Record, the library has been a source for free access to knowledge, information, and resources in Mansfield. That will never change. The library is a bridge connecting people to the knowledge and resources they might not otherwise have access to. But the technological and information era has changed the landscape. Things that used to be a barrier to access are eroding and the amount of information and resources now available is ever-expanding and changing.

While the library continues to be a storehouse of traditional materials, it also is expanding to offer new and innovative items that people might not think a library would offer. The library is way more than just books. It is no longer limited

by the walls of its nine locations or the daily operating hours either. Customers across the community and across the state can access the library anywhere, anytime using digital resources. They can take classes, learn new skills online, read or listen to books on their devices, stream movies, and check out things like telescopes, power tools, and more.

In the global and digital age, the library recognizes the importance of being rooted in the community offering innovative resources, programming, and events specifically for its customers. The library is a center for people of all ages to come together to have fun, learn, grow, craft, seek knowledge and understanding, connect, and engage!

MRCPL Goals

- Amplify its role as a community gather space.
- Maximize its reach beyond the physical buildings.
- Positively impact lives through responsive programming.

Learn more about the MRCPL <https://www.mrcpl.org>.

Anyone can donate to the MRCPL Winnie Greer Fund; go to richlandcountyfoundation.org, click the donate button and select the fund from the drop-down box or write a check payable to the Richland County Foundation and note the fund on the memo line.