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Donors establish fund to endow downtown flowers



ASHLAND - What if the annuals that have graced downtown Ashland each summer since the city's Bicentennial could beautify Main Street perennially, long into the future?

That's the vision of Ron and Barb Leddy as they launch a campaign to pay for the flowers in perpetuity by repurposing and matching an existing endowment fund with Ashland County Community Foundation.

The Leddys have been instrumental in what has become one of the most visible and lasting impacts of the Bicentennial celebration. Barb is a member of Garden Study Club, which regularly partners with Substance Church to plant the flowers. Ron sits on the Ashland Main Street Board and helps coordinate annual fundraising for the flowers.

"I'm going to be leaving the Ashland Main Street board in two years and I wanted them to be in a position where they wouldn't have to figure out who they were going to call for the money each year," Ron said.

As the Leddys began thinking of sustainable ways to make the flowers a permanent downtown fixture, they reached out to Ashland County Community Foundation.

The Leddys originally planned to contribute the \$10,000 needed to establish a new fund with the foundation. At the suggestion of ACCF Executive Director James Cutright, and with the blessing of Bicentennial co-chair Rick Spreng, the Leddys decided to pool their money with \$100,000 left over from the Bicentennial.

The \$100,000 had originally been set aside after the Bicentennial celebration in 2015 to pay for future community events, but the money was not being utilized, Cutright told the Leddys.

"We have this beautiful opportunity," Cutright said. "The original intent of these residual dollars from the Bicentennial was to try to impact Ashland in a positive way through events and activities, but we came to realize they may be better suited to beautifying the downtown area and enhancing the quality of life for people shopping downtown or visiting downtown restaurants."

Ashland Main Street Executive Director Sandra Tunnell agreed the flowers honor the spirit of the original fund by perpetuating the mood of excitement that began with the Bicentennial celebration.

“Aside from our events, the flowers are probably the most impactful thing we do,” Tunnell said. “Every year people are so appreciative. We always get tons of compliments from people who are from Ashland who come back to visit and from complete strangers who are just passing through.”

The Leddys signed on to become co-chairs in a campaign to raise the remaining \$90,000 that will need to be invested in the Ashland Downtown Flowers Fund. With a total of \$200,000, the fund will generate enough income to pay for the flowers every year, for generations to come.

Each year, four percent of the money in the endowed fund will be distributed to Ashland Main Street to pay for the flowers. As the fund grows, the principal will remain untouched, creating a growing pool of income that can be used to fund the annual flower purchases.

The Leddys are in the process of setting up a committee to help with the fundraising. They know it will be a significant commitment of their time and resources, but they feel the investment is well worth the effort.

“The flowers are so important because first impressions are important,” Ron Leddy said. “They demonstrate that Ashland is a vibrant city and that it’s a welcoming place and a good place to raise your family.”

“Driving through downtown,” Barb Leddy added, “the flowers make Ashland feel like a more welcoming place because you can tell that people care.”

Cutright said the foundation is pleased to be involved with the Leddys efforts.

“We connect people who care with causes that matter,” he said. “That’s what we’re all about.”

Donations to the Ashland Downtown Flowers Fund can be made by contacting Ron and Barb Leddy, c/o Ashland County Community Foundation, 300 College Avenue, Ashland OH 44805 or by calling (419) 281-4733. Donors may contribute any amount at any time, including pledges that may be paid over a five-year period. Contributions may also be made online by visiting www.accommunityfoundation.org and clicking “Donate to a Fund.”

About Ashland County Community Foundation: Ashland County Community Foundation advances philanthropy and improves the quality of life in Ashland County by supporting charitable activities, providing and administering planned giving programs, and serving as responsible stewards of scholarship, as well as individual and organizational funds for specific charities. ACCF has over \$55 million in invested assets and has awarded over \$15.3 million in scholarships, grants and distributions.