Ashland County Community Foundation’s Women’s Fund celebrates 15 years

The Women’s Fund of the Ashland County Community Foundation celebrated its 15th anniversary with a dinner event on Tuesday, Sept. 24. The evening’s theme of “Celebrating the Past, Envisioning the Future” focused on women, philanthropy and community impact.

“Endowment equals empowerment,” said Jim Cutright, ACCF executive director, in his opening comments, in a news release. “The Women’s Fund is a great example of this concept. In 15 years, 590 donors have contributed $436,573 to the Women’s Fund, resulting in the distribution of 80 grants totaling $133,460 that have impacted over 10,000 women and children. And still, the current Fund balance stands at $502,592. This is the power of endowment, of women empowering other women ... today and for years to come.”

With 200 in attendance, Dr. JoAnn Ford Watson addressed the group, as its keynote speaker. Sharing stories of her family’s heritage, the significant contributions of women throughout Ashland County’s history and the importance of trusting in one’s dreams to up build each other and our community, Watson spoke of the transforming impact of empowering women. She said, “From the founding of Ashland City and County, women have made extraordinary contributions. Women have exerted themselves in doing good for others with great love and generosity and service. The significant legacy of strong visionary women who built and founded Ashland is carried on today by the legacy and work of the Women’s Fund. Women continue to lift up women in times of need, enhancing their quality of life in profound ways. What a beautiful gift women are to each other.”

Watson went on to say, “Throughout Ashland’s history, with hard work and a benevolent spirit for accomplishing good, women have built and shaped and transformed Ashland, carrying on the vision of strong women empowering other women. We stand tonight committed that we will carry this forward, creating a powerful wave of continued good which will not tarnish or fade but will endure and grow.”

Historical vignettes featured Martha Buckner as Mildred Myers, Ashland’s first woman to hold a public office in the 1940s, and Sue Amstutz as Sarah Andrews, a “founding mother” of Ashland in the 1800s.
Sherry Bouquet, executive director of Fostering Family Ministries, shared how “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World” and spoke to the impact of receiving a Women’s Fund grant to certify and provide trainings to individuals and professionals involved in foster care.

Joy Reep, chair of the Women’s Fund, presented the sixth annual Dr. Lucille G. Ford “Freedom from Selfishness” Award to Diana Brechbuhler. “This prestigious award is to honor an Ashland County woman who demonstrates a long-standing commitment to philanthropy, a lifetime of dedicated, committed service,” said Reep. “A few words to describe this year’s recipient are leader, inspirational, creative, enthusiastic, goes the extra mile, and the list goes on.”

A few of Brechbuhler’s many contributions to Ashland County over the years include being an active booster of Hillsdale academic and athletic programs, Hillsdale School Board president, serving on the boards of Ashland Symphony Orchestra and Ashland County Historical Society, 2006 Woman of Achievement, an ACCF charter founding member and founding chairwoman of ACCF’s Women’s Fund.”

Fifteen years ago, as founding chairwoman of the Women’s Fund, Brechbuhler led her committee of Jan Archer, Sue Banks, Pat Byerly, Suzanne Carruthers, Nancy Davis, Lori Drushal, Margaret Ann Hess, Susanne Reineke, Susan Shafer and Susanne Zunk to realize the dream of a Women’s Fund. Their goal of a $100,000 fund was exceeded by raising $200,000 with 146 founding members, or “gems.” Thus began the Women’s Fund and its impact on Ashland County women through grantmaking, which empowers Ashland County women to achieve their full potential.

Reep also recognized this year’s Women’s Fund Scholarship recipient Logan Garber, as well as this year’s 10 grant recipients and current and prior Steering Committee members. She expressed gratitude to the Ashland County Historical Society for their partnership in planning this event. “The dresses, hats, gloves and more on display as centerpieces and around the room are from the Historical Society. We sincerely thank them in helping us celebrate women throughout history and the important roles they’ve played.”