

Our Community. Your Foundation.

November 15 is National Philanthropy Day:

A Message from Community Foundation President John Vasconcellos

Our Community. Your Foundation. That is our mantra at the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts. A community foundation – unlike any other foundation – is uniquely obligated to be a reflection of the community we serve. And our community is an extraordinary one.

Several months ago, the Community Foundation was invited by the Boston-based Barr Foundation to submit a proposal for \$500,000 which will allow the Community Foundation to invest in our arts and culture work in New Bedford and Fall River and take us to the next level for the arts. As part of this “What’s Next?” campaign, we heard hundreds of local stakeholders share their vision for the arts in New Bedford, a community that is already recognized by the Mass Cultural Council as the most Creative Community in the Commonwealth. Our conversations included: youth from Dream Out Loud who speak as passionately as anyone we’ve met about the power of creativity to transform lives; some of New Bedford’s newest residents from Central America who yearn for the opportunity to share their art (or who shared with us their hopes for building on their Fiesta Tipica de Guatemala); leaders from our wonderful arts and cultural organizations who challenged us to think big and take New Bedford to its next level in artistic expression; and to the many, many creative people who either through vocation or avocation are compelled to create and express the beautifully varied experiences of our lives. As we await word on the outcome of our proposal, we are inspired to take what we have learned and build on it. This is our community.

Just two weeks ago, we got a call from Maria Rosario at NorthStar Learning Centers and David Lima at the Inter-Church Council seeking our help as their organizations, along with the United Way, YWCA, Catholic Social Services and United New Bedford, have

been faced with a challenge that would not have anticipated one month prior: the arrival in New Bedford of dozens of our fellow Americans who have been forced to leave their homes in Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Since the storm ravaged the island on September 20, more than seventy-five families from Puerto Rico have found their way here with dozens of children now attending school in New Bedford. Our community has a long and rich history of being a port of refuge for those Americans seeking safe harbor: from African-American slaves seeking freedom, Portuguese immigrants seeking opportunity, and now survivors of Hurricane Maria seeking respite. In response to this urgent need, we established the Unidos Para Familias Fund (United For Families) that has raised money to provide children and families with emergency shelter and basic services. GiftsToGive, a true force for good in our community, has stepped up and will host a fundraising event for the Fund on December 16, and the Island Foundation, an incomparably generous partner in our work, has stepped up with a grant to kick-off the Fund. This is our community.

These are just two recent examples of how our community has partnered with your foundation to come together to solve a problem, advance a cause, provide an answer. It is what we do, as a community foundation, but more importantly, as a community.

We, as a society, talk a lot about community. What defines it? Who constitutes it? How has it changed? Does it even exist outside of social media? These examples provide, for me, great insight into defining community: shared values, mutual respect, listening, fellowship, proximity and empathy.

Today is National Philanthropy Day. And it is appropriate that it falls one week prior to our national holiday of giving thanks. This year, at the Community Foundation, we are grateful for the community we serve and of which we are a part. This is indeed our community and we are happy to be a foundation that helps to keep us strong and hopeful and caring.

Regards,



John Vasconcellos