



THE SPARTANBURG COUNTY FOUNDATION
Your Community Foundation

Mary L. Thomas Biography



Mary L. Thomas has over 25 years of experience in the nonprofit sector. She currently serves as the Chief Operating Officer of The Spartanburg County Foundation where she is responsible for the day to day operations of the organization, and leads the mission, vision and strategies of the Foundation while translating the Foundation's goals into the overall program of work.

Prior to joining the Foundation in 1998, Ms. Thomas was the Executive Director of the Bethlehem Community Center, an inner city ministry that serves women and children in Spartanburg, SC. During this time, Ms. Thomas spent three months in Eastern Africa leading a mission team to develop a village for Rwandan refugee and Zairian Street children. Her work as executive director of the Bethlehem Community Center was also recognized at the General Board of Global Ministries Annual Conference in Kansas City in the late 90's in recognition of the children who died in the Oklahoma City Bombing.

Ms. Thomas is a graduate of Winthrop University, and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in French and Communications. She was an exchange student to France through Lenoir-Rhyne College in 1983 and is a former French teacher in Spartanburg District 7 schools.

Ms. Thomas is a very active leader in the Spartanburg Community and has held extensive leadership roles with a host of organizations throughout the area and beyond. She currently serves on the boards of Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System (SRHS), and is chairwoman of the SRHS Strategic Planning Committee, The Southeastern Council of Foundations, Northside Development Project, Spartanburg Rotary Club, and BMW Community Advisory Panel. Her past board service includes: CF Leads, Women in Philanthropy, AFL Advisory Board, the Mary Black Health System Women's and Children's Advisory Board, the Mary Black Health System Board of Trustees, SC ETV Advisory Board, and is a former Commissioner for The South Carolina State Housing and Finance Authority. Ms. Thomas is a graduate of Leadership Spartanburg, Furman University Diversity Leadership Institute, and Spartanburg Regional Fellows. She is a Past Chair of The SC Grantmakers, the Spartanburg County Consensus Project and Spartanburg Communities in Schools.

Ms. Thomas's many honors include being named the first African American winner of the 2006 Council on Foundation's Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking, which came with a \$10,000 award and sculpture. Ms. Thomas took the cash prize and established a fund (*The Mary L. Thomas Award*) to perpetuate a vision of grassroots leadership, giving voice to those members of her community who are change agents in their "own right." *The Mary L. Thomas Award for Civic and Community Leadership* is a result of Mary's generosity to give her cash prize back to the community. She challenged the community to match her money to recognize others who "fly under the radar" and need encouragement in their quest to make a difference. As a result of this challenge, hundreds of gifts large and small helped make this vision a reality. The Fund garnered over \$150,000 in just a few months and has been endowed to strengthen voices throughout Spartanburg County.

Ms. Thomas is most noted for her work building partnerships across the public, private and nonprofit sectors to bring about community improvement. This is most notable in the Spartanburg Community Indicators Project, which is a report that is released three times a year which reveals key statistics regarding the status of health, education, social environment, civic engagement and our natural environment throughout Spartanburg County. She has been instrumental in building a large scale collaborative that is now known as a best practice across the country. To learn more, visit the Indicators website at www.strategicspartanburg.org.

Other honors include the James E. Whitmire Meritorious Award, the Sunrise Civitan Good Citizen Award, the Mary McCloud Bethune Trailblazer Award (presented by the National Council of Negro Women), the 1998 Piedmont Area Girl Scouts Woman of Achievement, a 1997 YMCA Black Achiever, Junior League Sustainer of the Year, and numerous others. She is a member of Cornerstone Baptist Church and recently led a church-wide strategic planning process for the 2000 plus members of one of the fastest growing churches in the area, www.cbconthegrow.com. She is an ordained minister and the second female to be ordained in the Rocky River Baptist Association.



Community Foundation of the Lowcountry

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J. Eric Woods

Denise K. Spencer

President and CEO

May 22, 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

It appears you have a wonderful opportunity before you! It is again time to bestow the Distinguished Service Award on a "visionary leader who inspires and embodies the qualities that define absolute excellence in philanthropy, including commitment, courage, entrepreneurship and impact." The truth is that you need look no more—Mary Thomas is exactly the individual who defines this role!

I first admired Mary from my perch as the President and CEO of the Midland Area Community Foundation in Midland, Michigan, many years ago. She was then doing program work at Spartanburg, and actually had received an honor for that service at the COF Conference in Pittsburg that year. From the development of a national reputation at that point, she became the leader to watch. The blessing for me is that I later came to South Carolina to take the helm of the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, and have gotten to know Mary personally.

She is a teacher. She is a collaborator. She happily shares her knowledge and expertise, and others share with her as a result. No one questions her integrity. No one. No one questions her work ethic. No one. And no one questions her dedication to mission, to community, and to her team. She is a mentor not only to the staff who report to her (one of them used to work for me, and has grown to appreciate Mary's mentorship as much as I have), but to many others in the philanthropic landscape. Her education, her knowledge and her experience all fit the profile of this "visionary leader." She is well-spoken, yet approachable; intelligent, yet down-to-earth, and these qualities also fit the profile of this "visionary leader." But she also has a beautiful, caring face—the face of leadership, compassion, integrity and community. I know she is adored by nonprofits, trusted by donors, and respected by colleagues and peers. Her professionalism is beyond works. She is led by values and a love of people, and she leads in the same way.

I encourage you to make it easy on yourself. Stop here. Consider no further. You have found your Distinguished Service Award winner in the person of Mary Thomas.

Live generously,

Denise K. Spencer
President and CEO



Confirmed in compliance
with national standards for
U.S. community foundations



THE SPARTANBURG COUNTY FOUNDATION

Your Community Foundation

May 20, 2014

Dear Selection Committee,

I am pleased to acknowledge my full support in nominating Mary L. Thomas, chief operating officer of The Spartanburg County Foundation, for the Council on Foundations' Distinguished Service Award. I have had the privilege of working with Mary in multiple capacities for the past seven years and believe that she is a visionary leader who embraces those qualities of commitment, courage, entrepreneurship, and impact that you are looking for in this Award recipient. It is her commitment to excellence and those qualities that have positioned Mary as a well-respected and innovative philanthropic leader not only throughout the Spartanburg County community but across the Country.

The Spartanburg County Foundation has been a leader in philanthropy for almost 75 years. As the Chief Operating Officer, Mary is responsible for the day to day operations of the organization, and leads the mission, vision and strategies of the Foundation while translating the Foundation's goals into the overall program of work. It is because of her incredible leadership in transforming the work of the Foundation through strategic thinking and planning for the past 16 years that the Foundation has defined what it means to be a community leader and implemented several initiatives that have become best practice models throughout the United States.

Mary has worked diligently to innovatively address pressing needs in the community and leverage partnerships to achieve maximum impact. A great example is found in the Strengthening Voices Initiative, which was designed to empower the community to assume responsibility for positive social change. In addition to forming several partnerships and leveraging local, state, regional and national funding to provide capacity-building grants to the community, Mary worked to launch the Grassroots Leadership Development Institute. This intense seven-month leadership training program is designed to equip grassroots leaders with the knowledge, skill-set and resources to be effective in leading change at the grassroots level. Through Mary's leadership, the Foundation has built a seven-year partnership with the City of Spartanburg and has graduated more than 225 individuals who are now serving the community in multiple capacities.

It was Mary's work with the Strengthening Voices Initiative that led to her receiving the Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking in 2006. Mary used this recognition once again to leverage her cash award of \$10,000 by establishing the Mary L. Thomas Award for Civic Leadership and Community Change Fund to recognize individuals in Spartanburg County, who like Mary, serves as a community leader, innovator and contributor to community change by addressing critical issues in Spartanburg County. With the community's help, she was able to raise over \$100,000 for this fund, which has enabled the Foundation to offer an annual award to a deserving community leader. This is one of many examples in which Mary has demonstrated her commitment to the community, and her courage and entrepreneurship skills to create an innovative solution that has achieved maximum impact.

In addition to my work with Mary at the Foundation, I serve alongside her on Board of Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System, the 11th largest hospital system in the nation. As part of her service on the Board, Mary is the Chair of the Hospital's Strategic Planning Committee. I have watched as Mary has led this group of doctors and community leaders to new levels of engagement.

I could provide endless examples of Mary's ability to leverage limited resources, create strategic partnerships, and serve as a knowledge source to the community and philanthropic sector. I am happy to further discuss with you why I believe Mary's commitment to community, proven track record in the field, and ability to innovatively address issues in ways that have become best practice models for other communities sets her apart from other philanthropists and makes her the perfect candidate to receive the Distinguished Service Award. I may be reached at 864-266-3691.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,
Robert E. Gregory, Jr.
Chairman of the Board

Sheila S. Breitweiser, Ed.D.
704 Derby Court
Durham, NC 27707
Cell 864-641-8763
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May 20, 2014

Re: Mary Louise Thomas Nomination for the Distinguished Service Award of the Council on Foundations

To Whom It May Concern:

It is both an honor and privilege to provide this letter supporting the nomination of Ms. Mary L. Thomas for the Council on Foundations Distinguished Service Award. Ms. Thomas is an extraordinary professional who has dedicated her life on behalf of philanthropic work to a standard of excellence that is not paralleled in my experience.

I have known Ms. Thomas for nearly two decades as a friend and colleague. During my 11 years as president of the SC School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB), Ms. Thomas' leadership in philanthropy made her one of the most effective community advocates I have ever met. On a more personal level, it was through her exemplary philanthropy work on behalf of public education that she and I developed our collegial bonds for which I remain most grateful.

Through the years, this community has benefited greatly from the excellent, innovative programs that she led in designing and implementing. However, Ms. Thomas' work has gone far beyond our local and state communities to a national level. Her extraordinary ability to create and share exciting visions has been of great interest to other communities throughout the nation. Her impact not only on our community, but also on others at a national level has been totally inspiring. In describing her significant impact, I am limited only by space in listing the programs that she has carried far beyond the borders of Spartanburg County, including: the community indicators program, healthy organizations institute, senior citizen agenda, teen pregnancy prevention project, grassroots leadership program, and mental health initiative. And, the list could go on and on with programs she has led to address the complex issues that plague society.

During my years as the executive director of another local foundation, my esteem for Ms. Thomas continued to grow. She has been my "go-to" person in seeking guidance and leadership with programs that will benefit others in a meaningful way. Ms. Thomas is unfailingly generous with both her time and talents in assisting colleagues in efforts to advance the common good.

In studying the announcement for the Distinguished Service Award nominations process, I am impressed by how amazingly well Ms. Thomas represents the award's lofty standards. Without a doubt, I am confident that Ms. Thomas will be a worthy recipient of this prestigious award.

She truly is a visionary leader who inspires and embodies the qualities that define absolute excellence in philanthropy. Her philanthropic leadership reflects commitment, courage, entrepreneurship and impact far beyond what our expectations (and even hopes) might reasonably expect.

In summary, Ms. Thomas has uplifted many facets of philanthropic work by her outstanding programmatic and people skills. She consistently demonstrates her unique ability to identify and nurture community, state and national resources to benefit countless organizations and individuals.

My recommendation for Ms. Thomas as this year's recipient of the Council on Foundations Distinguished Service Award comes with my heartfelt esteem and full faith in her ability to represent the highest standards of the council and, indeed, the philanthropic community.

Please contact me if I can provide any additional information related to this endorsement of my outstanding colleague and friend, Ms. Mary Louise Thomas.

Sincerely,



Sheila Breitweiser, Ed.D.
President, South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (Retired)
Vice-President and Executive Director, Spartanburg Regional Health System Foundation
(Retired)



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May 20, 2014

Dear Selection Committee:

It is with great honor that I join The Spartanburg County Foundation in the nomination of Mary L. Thomas for the Council on Foundations' Distinguished Service Award. I have known Mary for twelve years at a highly engaged level professionally and personally. Mary is without question the most professional and visionary leader that I have ever known, and a servant leader in the highest regard.

I had the privilege of serving as a Trustee of The Spartanburg County Foundation from 2006 - 2012. Unique to our Foundation is that every Trustee elected is required to serve as Chair in their sixth year of seven years of service. Knowing this, I immediately began striving to understand the larger framework of philanthropy. I knew most importantly that I needed to identify a mentor, someone who could assist me in becoming a more well-rounded thought leader and knowledge source in this arena. Mary undeniably was the best choice. She helped me understand what the future of the Foundation could be, and how I could use my energy and skills as a Trustee to propel the organization and the community forward.

Over the seven years of my Board service, Mary lead our organization from a traditional charitable organization to one that provides significant Community Leadership in making systemic change in our community, while aligning donor philanthropy with larger strategies for broader change.

Mary works diligently to bring our vision as Trustees to a higher level by helping us to look past our own community so that we see how others are addressing issues and can gain a better understanding of how we can work together to address similar issues within Spartanburg County. In her role, she has identified and secured national leaders to help facilitate our Board retreats and training sessions. Additionally, she leads the strategic planning and implementation for our organization. To that end, Mary brilliantly continues to lead her staff to support the Board in every way without getting ahead of the Board, and making Board Leadership as efficient and rewarding as possible.

I have watched Mary, on a national level, present best practices of Governance, Community Leadership, Board Development, Community Indicators and many other topics. I have also co-presented with Mary on a number of occasions and have had the opportunity to see first-hand the unwavering respect that Mary receives from her peers and strangers in all arenas. Mary was repeatedly sought after for her expertise and wisdom spontaneously in national sessions where other expert panelist would ask for her opinion or input if they could not answer the question or address an important issue.

Mary also has an extraordinary ability to engage grassroots leaders at a higher level. Her innovative solution to engaging citizen's at a grassroots level through the Grassroots Leadership Development Institute and her ability to use this solution to impact systemic change in our community has grown to be a national leadership training model that engages citizens in neighborhoods to lead in effective ways to create systemic change.

Mary not only teaches, but also convenes other leaders and experts regularly to effect systemic change in our own community. She is an eloquent and inspirational leader. Mary does not meet a stranger, and through her kindness and grace people adore her. She is an extraordinary person and is always focused on the best and brightest future for all people and the organization that she serves. I can think of no other individual who would be better fitted for this prestigious award, and no other individual who is more deserving than Mary Thomas.

Sincerely,

Jennifer C. Evins
President & CEO



SISTERS of CHARITY FOUNDATION
OF SOUTH CAROLINA

May 23, 2014

Dear Madam/Sir:

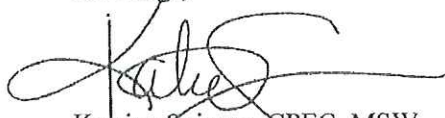
It is indeed an honor to provide you with this letter of recommendation on behalf of Mary Thomas whom I have had the distinct privilege of knowing for the past 9 years as a colleague in philanthropy. Ms. Thomas is a highly recognized leader throughout the state of South Carolina, regionally, and nationally for her ability to strategically develop and lead efforts that are transformative for individuals and communities. Ms. Thomas is an incisive leader who is highly respected and sought-after for her leadership expertise, wisdom, and aptitude for leading change.

As the former chairwoman of the SC Grantmakers Network, a membership organization comprised of family, community, health legacy, independent and private foundations across SC, I witnessed firsthand, her leadership in shaping the collective philanthropic agenda for South Carolina. Additionally, serving as a board member of the Southeastern Council of Foundations, a membership network representing foundations across 11 states in the Southeast, I have seen her leadership signature of excellence on the tasks in which she is assigned as a board member. Ms. Thomas has made a significant contribution to shaping the direction of the Southeastern Council of Foundations, as she has been a thought-leader and led collaborative efforts to situate philanthropy in the Southeast for 21st Century impact.

Finally, as the Senior Program Director of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina, I can personally attest to how much Ms. Thomas' leadership in the Spartanburg County Foundation has impacted the lives of those she leads. I have witnessed her passion for the work and her compassion for those she serves. I have witnessed her commitment to justice. I have witnessed her courage. I have witnessed her resilience. She has used these strengths to work with others across the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Ms. Thomas is a person of integrity, faith, and charisma and it is her authenticity that draws others and causes them to want to follow.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy." I have seen and experienced Mary Thomas' joy in serving. Therefore, I believe Mary Thomas is deserving of the Council on Foundations Distinguished Service Award. She is a visionary leader that possesses all the qualities that you seek in a recipient. If you would like to discuss in more detail my experience and knowledge of Ms. Thomas, please do not hesitate to give me a call either at 803.254.0230, ext. 15.

Blessings,



Katrina Spigner, CPEC, MSW
Senior Program Director

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

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THE SPARTANBURG COUNTY FOUNDATION
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Supporting Documentation - Media Articles

The following media articles highlight some of the initiatives that Mary Thomas has played an integral role in developing and leading.

New initiative will help seniors stay active, healthy

Published in the Spartanburg Herald Journal February 5, 2014

Senior adults in the VSP Club in Chesnee were very active recently participating in exercise and art classes.

Terry Cash, a local businessman, stood in the lobby of the building on East Manning Street and stared out toward all of the activities. The center is part of the VSP Club of Senior Centers of Spartanburg County.

"This is a model that works well," he said.

Cash was impressed by what he saw, but he still believes there needs to be more activities in the community for Spartanburg's older residents. He is part of a new senior wellness initiative that hopes to make that happen and see results within a year.

The initiative includes the involvement of more than a dozen organizations and government entities, including Spartanburg County, the Spartanburg County Foundation, Spartanburg County Parks and more.

Their goal is to explore ways to use existing parks and recreational facilities to create more activities for baby boomers and retirees in the county. The senior wellness initiative also hopes to add additional facilities in the future.

Jim Campbell, interim director of the Spartanburg County Parks Department, said the effort is important because of the large number of senior adults living in Spartanburg County.

"There are a growing number of senior adults," he said. "What can we do for all of them? In 10 years, more than 25 percent of Spartanburg County will be over the age of 65. It's good public policy to keep people active, as opposed to inactive and going to nursing homes. That's it, pure and simple."

He said partnerships are important in order to make progress and achieve goals.

"I think that the real purpose of getting folks together across the spectrum is to make them aware of the need," Campbell said. "I think also people have recognized that no one organization can do it alone. No one organization can fund everything that needs to be funded. So whatever happens, needs to be some sort of collaboration between all of the people who are sitting at the table."

There are four senior centers scattered throughout Spartanburg County and another facility is currently under construction in Cowpens. There are locations in Chesnee, Spartanburg, Pacolet and Woodruff. Membership is \$45 a year and the facilities offer a variety of activities throughout the day. The Pacolet center has 58 members. The Woodruff facility has 29 and the Archibald Rutledge Center has 242 members.

Campbell says the existing facilities, other than the center in Chesnee — which has close to 200 members — are under-utilized and they are not as nice as they should be. He said the centers in Woodruff and Pacolet are essentially "glorified gymnasiums" and are not likely to draw the kind of numbers that are being drawn to Chesnee.

Cash, who also serves on the board of the Spartanburg County Foundation, added that there are not enough senior centers in the county. "They are only touching a very small percentage of the population, and they are geared more toward serving meals," he said. "What we are looking to do is put a number of these all across the county in different places. We want to offer programs that are built around more than just serving a meal."

He also hopes to put programs for seniors in some of Spartanburg's buildings that currently sit vacant.

"We want seniors to be involved mentally and socially and in every other way," he said. Spartanburg County took over the expenses of the Chesnee Senior Center in July. The \$1.2 million center opened in 2003. It was built with private donations and grants by the VSP (Very Special People) Foundation, said Cash, who is also a VSP member. The building was expanded to add an exercise area about four years ago, and last summer, the Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System installed an updated kitchen to promote nutrition. The facility was previously operated by the Senior Centers of Spartanburg, but Campbell said the organization was struggling financially and the center was in danger of closing. Spartanburg County purchased the center for a nominal fee - \$100 plus associated fees and closing costs - and has committed about \$194,000 to operating it in the 2014 budget year.

The "magic" of the Chesnee center is that it is controlled by the seniors, Campbell said. Seniors decide what types of presentations they would like, and through a network of volunteers, an expert in the field is located to do a demonstration or class. Activities at the center have included art classes, crafting, healthy cooking and dancing. Cash said the VSP Club serves as a model and if the senior wellness initiative is successful other senior centers in Spartanburg will eventually follow suit.

Pilot program launched to strengthen charity groups

Published in the Spartanburg Herald Journal January 17, 2014

The pilot program for a new initiative aimed at strengthening local nonprofits got underway Friday. Executive directors and board chairs for the dozen organizations chosen to participate in the Healthy Organization Institute met at the University of South Carolina Upstate's George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics in downtown Spartanburg.

They will spend the next five months running through a curriculum that seeks to establish a set of best practices for charitable groups and agencies in the area. It includes peer learning, classroom instruction and creative learning principles that leaders will be encouraged to implement within their organizations.

The program has been in the works for the last three years. It is funded by a group called the Joint Funders consisting of the Mary Black Foundation, The Spartanburg County Foundation, Spartanburg Regional Foundation, and the United Way of the Piedmont. USC Upstate's business school joined the effort last year.

"Nothing like this has ever been done (in Spartanburg) before," said Colleen Campbell Bozard, who runs the Columbia-based national consulting firm tasked with helping to develop and teaching the institute curriculum. "Basically, it will help everyone get on the same page. It will establish a set of best practices for local nonprofits and improve collaboration, maximizing the effectiveness of each organization and benefiting the community."

Organizations in the pilot program include the Adult Learning Center Inc., Bethlehem Center, BirthMatters, Hub City Farmers' Market, Middle Tyger Community Center, Mobile Meals of Spartanburg, Senior Centers of Spartanburg County, Spartanburg County First Steps, The Children's Advocacy Center of Spartanburg, Cherokee & Union Counties Inc., The Haven Inc., TOTAL Ministries and the Upstate Family Resource Center.

"This was a great opportunity for the Joint Funders and USC Upstate to partner and lead by example as it relates to collaborating together and avoiding duplication of services," said Mary Thomas, chief operating officer of The Spartanburg County Foundation, in a statement.

Participants will meet on a monthly basis and a graduation ceremony will be held at the end of the May session.

"This is very exciting," said Brendan Buttimer, interim executive director of the Hub City Farmers' Market. "You've got small groups working together with big groups. There's a lot of sharing going on. It provides great mentoring, networking and learning. It puts forward a set of best practices so we have a common understanding when we work together. I think it's going to be great for the United Way and the Joint Funders. But there will be a huge benefit for the community."

Molly Talbot-Metz, vice president of programs for Mary Black Foundation, said the pilot program will be assessed after it concludes. The plan is to roll out the institute two times per year in the spring and the fall. The institute will be available to any nonprofit that receives funding from one of the Joint Funders, Talbot-Metz said.

Institute helps develop grassroots leadership in Spartanburg

Published in the Spartanburg Herald Journal September 27, 2011

The Grassroots Leadership Development Institute gave Marilyn Sykes the voice she needed to affect changes at the Woodruff Community Center. Sykes had been the director of the Woodruff Community Center for two years, but was still a little "green" in her position when she learned about the program.

"I didn't really know what to expect," she said. During the seven-month course, she learned about communicating with her peers and the public, as well as refereeing disagreements among coworkers.

"I could apply every class to my job," Sykes said. "I learned valuable leadership and communication skills, and they had a wonderful grant-writing class." Sykes said she would recommend the development institute to anyone in a leadership position. "You make great connections. Networking is a huge part of the class," she said.

The Grassroots Leadership Development Institute is an initiative of the Spartanburg County Foundation, and the city of Spartanburg is a sponsor. Foundation Executive Vice President Mary Thomas said the institute began in 2004 in response to a downturn in the economy.

"We knew we needed to get creative with how to achieve greater impact in the community with less dollars," Thomas said. "We decided to focus on nonprofit groups and to build capacity there, and the idea was to create leaders who are deeply rooted in the community and to give them tools so they can be a voice of new leadership." Since 2004, the institute has graduated 150 new leaders.

"These are people who were already doing wonderful things in their own neighborhoods, or in the PTA or in their own nonprofit or businesses, but we wanted to give them the tools to start strategic thinking, to leverage community resources and to collaborate with one another and improve public speaking," Thomas said. "In essence, we just wanted to build on what they were already going and to bridge volunteer opportunities in the communities."

The leadership development institute meets one Saturday each month.

Other 2011 graduates are Dana Ballew, Cathy Garner, Sonya Gray, Calandra Hardy, Marshall Irby, Queen Kerns, Angela Means, Deborah Jean Moore, Martha Pearson, Anzonia Reeder, Jokeithlyn Ross, Jokeitha Seabrook, William Seabrook Jr., Erica Shanks, Mary Smith, Michelle Smith, Phoebe Smith-Hinton, Margaret Swindler, Jada Tessner, Marcus Thomas, Susan Vasquez, Stephanie Wade and Nicole Wilkins.

The Spartanburg County Foundation is accepting applications for its 2012 class. For more information, call Tara Weese at 582-0138 or download an application at www.spcf.org.

Study shows the need for Spartanburg to follow through on 40/30 Challenge

Published in the Spartanburg Herald Journal September 26, 2010

A national study was released last week with information that is critically important to Spartanburg County. The College Board, the national group best known for its SAT test, found that the value of a college degree is actually growing during the recession.

In its "Education Pays" report, the board found that not only do people with college degrees earn more, they are less likely to be unemployed. They are also more likely to have employer-provided health benefits than those who hold only a high school diploma. In fact, the board found that the gap between the economic success of college graduates and those without college degrees is widening.

That's important news to Spartanburg because fewer of our citizens have college degrees than other communities. The Spartanburg County Foundation reports that "only 19 percent of adults (age 25 and above) living in Spartanburg County have earned a bachelor's degree. This number falls far below the national average of 27 percent and the state average of 23 percent."

That shortfall is crucial to the future of this county. The economic future of our community is the sum of the economic future of its residents. Not only will Spartanburg County residents earn less and find it harder to hold onto jobs, but the county will find it harder to attract employers who are looking for a more skilled work force.

That's why the foundation, other educational groups and schools, charitable organizations and community-minded people have started the 40/30 Challenge. The goal is that by the year 2030, at least 40 percent of Spartanburg County residents over the age of 25 will have four-year college degrees.

This drive is critical in preparing this community for the future. It's more than a matter of economics. It's also a quality-of-life issue. The College Board study found that those with college educations are more likely to vote, more likely to be engaged in civic activity and more likely to pursue a healthy lifestyle. Our community is going to be more prosperous, more cohesive and an all-around better place to live if we can increase the educational attainment of our population.

The 40/30 Challenge is an ambitious goal, but the College Board study points out what is at stake in achieving that goal or in failing to reach it. This is a campaign that deserves the attention of everyone in our community.

It's more than higher education. It has to start in preschool and continue through the educational process. It involves more than the schools. Every group and social body that works with families and children has to support and encourage education, urging students to succeed and set their sights higher.

Parents and children have to be convinced that college is not only a reasonable goal, it is a necessary goal. Attending college has to become a minimum expectation rather than a maximum expectation. And civic organizations and institutions must do all they can to make sure this expectation is realized.

13 groups receive \$220,000 in foundation grants

Published in the Spartanburg Herald Journal March 24, 2010

The Spartanburg County Foundation has awarded \$220,000 in grants to 13 organizations serving the county. The grants are part of the Clemson Compassion Project, a collaboration between the foundation and Clemson University's Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life.

The partnership seeks to strengthen the capacity of faith and community-based organizations to improve local conditions by helping organizations with training, technical support and grant-making. Since 2004, the partnership has given more than \$1.2 million in grants and technical assistance.

Organizations receiving funding this year include: the Butterfly Foundation (\$10,000), the Haven (\$20,000), the PACE Center (\$20,000), Pineview Hills Neighborhood Association (\$15,000), REACH Upstate (\$20,000), Ridgeville Baptist Church (\$20,000), SAFE Homes-Rape Crisis Coalition (\$20,000), The Salvation Army (\$20,000), Southeastern Children's Home (\$20,000), Spartanburg Interfaith Hospitality Network (\$5,000), Spartanburg Terrace Tenants Association (\$15,000), Westgate Training and Consulting Network (\$20,000) and Woodruff Community Center (\$15,000).

Foundation forms teams to improve county

Published in the Spartanburg Herald Journal September 17, 2006

For the first time in almost 20 years of producing periodic "community indicators" reports to measure the well-being of the community, the Spartanburg County Foundation has formed a "project enhancement team" of 32 community leaders to implement recommendations from its most recent report.

The project is called the Community Improvement Plan, and it was born out of the foundation's "Community Indicators VI: Strategic Spartanburg" report that was published in late 2004. The foundation has been releasing such community indicators reports every two to three years since 1987. The reports contain a wealth of statistics on health-care, education, crime and families in Spartanburg County.

Representatives will arrive in Boston on Wednesday to present the plan at the fall conference of the Council on Foundations.

The foundation will partner with the Spartanburg County government to push the plan forward over the next three years.

Assistant County Administrator Tom Gates said that the county has invested about \$30,000 in the plan so far -- what he called the beginning of a more concerted effort to align the funding the county already provides on an annual basis to nonprofits with the goals and objectives of the community indicators project.

A second partner is United Way of the Piedmont.

In most communities, said local United Way President and CEO Kathy Dunleavy, the United Way and community foundations compete for resources and volunteers.

"We see that there's so much more benefit to working together," Dunleavy said.

In years past, the published reports have not yielded an organized effort to act on the findings and try to improve the indicators of the community, such as the number of teen pregnancies per year or the number of teachers that hold advanced degrees, to name just two of 60 indicators.

Mary Thomas, vice president for programs at the Spartanburg County Foundation, said the Community Improvement Plan is a way to put the indicators in action. "We see ourselves as a catalyst for inspiring people to really consider these indicators and to think about significantly different ways to make changes," Thomas said of the foundation's role in the indicators reports and the Community Improvement Plan.

Additionally, Dunleavy said that in enlisting sponsors and volunteers for the plan, she heard all kinds of comments like, "If this is just going to be another book that sits on the shelf, I do not have time for that."

"It was very important that this be a living, breathing document," Dunleavy said of the foundation's sixth indicators report, which influenced the goals of the Community Improvement Plan.

The plan consists of 10 goals under the categories of people, family, community and place.

For each goal, such as "Our citizens will manage our natural resources in a way that will support current and future generations," there is a panel of community leaders that will work toward that goal.

The goal of making Spartanburg County a more economically viable place to live is already underway. The Business Needs and Success Indicators survey will ask 1,045 area businesses their perceptions of Spartanburg and how capable the community currently is of meeting a businessperson's needs.

John Dargan, president and CEO of the Spartanburg County Foundation, said the plan's implementation should result in a fresh awareness of what's going on in Spartanburg County.

"If you immerse yourself in your community, that is the true measure of your success."