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# Community CONNECTIONS

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## Award Winning Philanthropists Honored at our Celebration of Philanthropic Excellence

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation honored three Excellence in Philanthropy Award winners February 17 at the Grand Ball room of the Carleton Hotel. These awards recognize those who have demonstrated significant philanthropic impact in our community.

The winners this year are: John A. Harris – Outstanding Individual Philanthropist; The Neighborhood Giving Project – Outstanding Philanthropic Group; and to OPRFHS student Ella Dixon – Outstanding Young Philanthropist. Each award provides a grant to the recipient's nonprofit of choice. John Harris's grant of \$1000 went to Wonderworks. The Neighborhood Giving Project's award of \$500 to Opportunity Knocks and Ella Dixon's award provides a grant of \$500 to Project Heal, serving those with eating disorders.

This is the sixth year Excellence in Philanthropy awards have been given by the Foundation. For a list of past winners, see: <http://www.oprfcf.org/index.php/excellence-awards>.

Our Celebration also includes news about the Community Foundation itself. Board member and President & CEO of The Donor's Forum, Eric Weinheimer, kicked off the program with encouragement to be involved. Our President & CEO, Kristin Carlson Vogen shared a synopsis of the impact the Foundation has had in our community and honored our outgoing Board Chair, Sheila Price. For more on the Foundation's work in 2014 visit our Downloads page at: <http://www.oprfcf.org/index.php/downloads> and click on our 2014 Highlights.

*continued inside*



Excellence in Philanthropy awards are given once a year in the three categories identified in this newsletter. Nominations can occur at any time before December 1. Contact Henry Kranz at [hkranz@oprfcf.org](mailto:hkranz@oprfcf.org) or by phone at 708-848-1560 for more information or to obtain nomination forms. These awards are a great way to honor those who give so much to our community.

## FOUNDATION STAFF

Cathy Craddock, *Administrative Assistant*  
Rhea Yap, *Donor Services & Grants Officer*  
Sheryl Martin, *Director of Finance*  
Elizabeth Chadri, *Program Officer*

Linda T. Francis, *Success of all Youth Director*  
Michele Ptack, *SAY Communications Mgr.*  
Henry Kranz, *Marketing Director*  
Trish Abbey, *Director, KGI*



Trish Abbey,  
Executive Director  
for the Kott  
Gerontology  
Institute

## HELPING KIDS IN THE MIDDLE



Brandi Ambrose,  
Counselor at  
Oak Park-River Forest  
High School and  
designer of the College  
Knowledge Project

### WELCOMING THE KOTT GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation welcomes The Kott Gerontology Institute (KGI) as a Supporting Organization. The Kott Gerontology Institute provides scholarships to masters level students who are interested in careers of working with aging. These students include Social Worker, Law, and Dance Movement therapy students from a wide variety of universities in the Chicagoland area. The scholarships are provided while students work with older adults in community based agencies as interns.

KGI also focuses on supporting emerging professionals in the field of aging through continuing education and training opportunities. KGI graduates are tracked after graduation and many Kott Scholars are now in leadership positions in the aging community throughout the Chicago area as well as across the country.

By becoming a supporting organization of the Foundation KGI becomes a special type of charitable organization that, based on its relationship to the Foundation, is itself classified as a public charity rather than a private foundation. This will provide more effective management and access to resources that can be used to further the KGI mission. Trish Abbey is the Executive Director of KGI and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. For more about KGI, please visit: <http://www.kottinstitute.org/>



KOTT GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE

In October 2014, Brandi Ambrose, a Counselor/ College Advisor at Oak Park and River Forest High School, approached the Foundation with an idea and an inquiry. Brandi was approved for a sabbatical leave for the 2014-2015 school year so she could develop a program, The College Knowledge Project that provides additional support for sophomore students who are currently meeting College Readiness Benchmarks yet struggle with a discrepant grade point average compared to their achievement scores.

She started to see a pattern during her time as a counselor. By the end of junior year, students who had not remedied their grade point averages were missing out on substantial opportunities to be accepted, as well as to receive scholarships, to colleges and universities that fit with their unique gifts and talents. In addition, the project works to increase college access for potential candidates who may be from underrepresented populations as well as First Generation to College students. As a First-Gen college student herself, she understands the additional hurdles that students and families experience when working to find the right fit for college.

Brandi pictured a program that would be able to identify 50 students by the end of their freshman year of high school, who fit the above parameters. The program would include a comprehensive college advising curriculum, weekly coaching and advising sessions with each student, intervention recommendations, and weekly feedback with parents or guardians. The expectation is that through these relationships, the students will be able to reach their individual goals which may, in turn, open additional opportunities for college acceptances and future scholarships. As an added incentive, she wanted to take these students – many of whom had never been on a college campus, and may not have had the resources to visit – to various colleges to recognize a variety of possibilities. This trip will include visits to large, small, private, and public colleges and an HBCU (Historically Black College and University). Brandi designed the program in her dreams, but didn't have the funding to support the first year.

In January, Terry and Jana McIlroy explored ways they might utilize the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation to provide a benefit to students in the community. As Kristin Carlson Vogen and Rhea Yap met with the McIlroys and discussed their interests, it became apparent that the College Knowledge Project would fit their desire to help "kids in the middle." "It was serendipitous!" said Terry. "We are interested in helping kids who need the help – those who are smart enough, but not straight A students; those who need an extra nudge. When Kristin mentioned the College Knowledge Project, we just knew that was what we wanted to help become a reality. Once we reviewed the program summary, we confirmed that this approach is well thought out and innovative." The McIlroys have contributed funding for the program's first year. Additionally, they are creating a donor advised fund with the Foundation that, in addition to their life time giving, will become a part of their estate plan.

Thanks to the McIlroys, the first year's cohort of the College Knowledge Project students will have access to regular coaching, and a trip to visit six different types of colleges. The Project needs additional funding for future years. If you have an interest in helping this project succeed, or would like to explore other ways the Community Foundation can assist you in making your philanthropic dreams become reality, please contact Rhea Yap, 708.848.1560, [ryap@oprfcf.org](mailto:ryap@oprfcf.org).

### **Outstanding Individual Philanthropist: John Harris**

John believes that creativity is the key to molding young people into successful adults, leading to healthy, sustainable communities. To this end, he has donated his time, talent and treasure to local organizations that help children at different stages of development and need, including:

- Wonder Works, A Children's Museum
- West Cook YMCA
- Oak Park Youth Baseball Softball
- Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance
- West Suburban PADS
- St. Giles Catholic Church
- Columbia College Chicago

John is truly an ambassador for all the organizations and causes he is involved with, encouraging everyone he meets, personally and professionally, to get involved in an organization and level (board membership, volunteering, donating, attending events) that fits their passion. He also encourages collaboration between the organizations to maximize the potential of each and avoid duplication of services. John has recruited and mentored many first time board members over the past 10 years. Many know when John Harris says to you, "Let's have coffee", that their lives will never be the same again!

### **Outstanding Philanthropic Group: The Neighborhood Giving Project**

The Neighborhood Giving Project (TNGP) mobilizes one of our community's most valuable resources – children and families – to impact our community in innovative and positive ways. TNGP is a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization that involves and connects youth and families in and to community service and charitable support opportunities that are developmentally appropriate for youth. Since 2009, TNGP has created kid-centered, family-friendly, fun service and philanthropic opportunities that benefit our neighbors and charitable/service-oriented organizations in the Oak Park-River Forest area and beyond.

TNGP's program structure includes three kinds of service opportunities. First, TNGP hosts service workshops at the Oak Park Public Library, gearing projects toward children ages 3 through 12. Partner community organizations educate families about the issues that they tackle in our community and promote their mission while participants take concrete, kid-sized action to assist these organizations. Second, service "field trips" offer families and older children, ages 6 and up, on site opportunities at community organizations where they can see how their work impacts their community and forge even stronger relationships with service providers. Third, TNGP is forming a Kids' Council to develop on-going participants in TNGP programs as leaders in and developers of service opportunities and philanthropic action in our community.

Because each project is completed by the hands, hearts, and minds of children, impact for organizations is counted



EIP 15 Winners

From Left to Right: President & CEO Kristin Carlson Vogen with the Excellence in Philanthropy Award Winners. Carrie Summy representing the Neighborhood Giving Project, then Outstanding Young Philanthropist Ella Dixon and Outstanding Individual Philanthropist, John A. Harris.

in terms of sandwiches delivered and blankets made, as well as money donated. TNGP has raised the consciousness of hundreds of children, and has connected them with their community in valuable ways that are immeasurable.

### **Outstanding Young Philanthropist: Ella Dixon**

Ella is a youth that stands out amongst her peers. She focuses her leadership and extra time outside of school in the main areas of Substance Abuse Prevention, Eating Disorders Prevention, Peace Circle Restorative Justice Interventions, and as an OPRF high school volunteer.

She has served on IMPACT's Board of Directors as High School Committee Chair.

She is vital to helping the coalition understand the issues of substance use and abuse in the high school setting from a student's perspective. She serves as a valuable resource for information. She has shown great courage surveying students at OPRF regarding their experience with drugs and alcohol, a difficult task for most students who are embarrassed to confront their peers. She participates in monthly board meetings and has helped plan and participate in Parent and Student cafes.

As a member of SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) at OPRF, Ella helped plan and execute activities for Red Ribbon Week at OPRF in October 2014 where 479 students attended presentations by speakers who talked about their experiences as former substance abusers and relayed their experiences of use and the road to recovery. During Red Ribbon Week, Ella helped with marketing a fundraising event at Chipotle where the PTO was able to raise \$670 for Red Ribbon Week.

Another area that Ella devotes her time to affecting many young women today is Eating Disorders. She participates in education and outreach through public speaking engagements Eating Disorder Prevention. She also has been a mentor to girls struggling with eating disorders.

Ella has been involved as a volunteer with Oak Park Township's Peace Circles and has gone through training as a Peace Keeper. She meets on a weekly basis with other Peace Circle participants before school. Ella also is a Spoken Word Leader at OPRF and has been trained and works as a Peer Tutor.

# COMMUNITYworks UPDATES

## Community Leadership Program Projects

Over nine Fridays between October and June, Community Leadership Program participants – local working professionals – joined with faculty facilitators from Dominican University's Brennan School of Business and a diverse roster of area business and governmental and nonprofit pros to further develop their acumen in the areas of project management, strategic planning, and creative problem-solving, as well as conflict resolution and staff motivation. As an essential experiential portion of this Program, participants formed teams to work on projects that aim to benefit Oak Park-River Forest.

You are invited to join the Community Leadership Program participants on Friday, 12 June 2015 at Dominican University (7900 West Division Street, River Forest) - Parmer Hall, 1:00 p.m. as they present the results of their program projects. The presentations will be followed by a cocktail reception.

Past Community Leadership Program Projects can be found at: <http://www.oprfcf.org/index.php/community-leadership>. The Communityworks / Dominican University Brennan School of Business Community Leadership Program is accepting applications for CLP7. Applications are due by Friday, July 17th. Interested candidates should email [clp@dom.edu](mailto:clp@dom.edu) or call the Brennan School of Business at 708-524-6810. The application is also accessible at: <http://business.dom.edu/academics/community-leadership-program>



SAY Steering Committee  
Representing 22 organizations serving young people in Oak Park and River Forest, the Success of All Youth Steering Committee meets regularly to review progress and to align efforts among participating entities.

## A Significant Milestone for Success of All Youth

Success of All Youth (SAY) has moved from “Exploring” to “Emerging,” the second of five gateways along the “Theory of Action” plan put forth by our national partner StriveTogether. StriveTogether supports partner communities such as ours with resources and a nationally recognized collective impact approach. Collective impact has emerged as a successful way for communities to align resources around shared outcomes.

## PlanItGreen 2014 Report:

In 2011, thanks to Communityworks, Oak Park and River Forest completed and launched PlanItGreen, a sustainability plan for both villages developed through an extensive community involvement process facilitated by Seven Generations Ahead. The plan is implemented through the collective work of many and supports the interests of leaders in engaging all levels of community to reduce their environmental footprint and advance common sustainability objectives.

PlanItGreen provides clear, tangible goals and action steps to work toward creating a healthy, sustainable future complete with goals, targets, and strategies in each of nine sustainability topic areas including energy, waste, transportation, water, food, education, community development, open space and ecosystems, and green economy. PlanItGreen completed its third year of implementation in 2014, and here are trends from the 2014 Report. Full details of the Report Card can be found at: <https://sevengenerationsahead.org/sustainability/planit-green>.

The Quick Glance below provides an assessment of our communities' progress in achieving goals within the Environmental Sustainability Plan for Oak Park and River Forest.

Thumbs Up: Exceeded Goals

Thumbs Sideways: Met Goals

Thumbs Down: Did Not Meet Goals





PING! Workshop for 4th & 5th Graders  
Elementary school students learning music in one of many workshops provided by PING!

# Music, Music Music!

PING!, Providing Instruments for the Next Generation (<https://sites.google.com/site/pingopr/>), began in 1998 when a group of parents and teachers noticed that a significant number of students were not participating in the outstanding instrumental music program offered by Oak Park School District 97. They discovered that the cost of renting or buying an instrument was a huge barrier for low income families. With 14 donated instruments and start-up funding from District 97, the Oak Park Area Arts Council (OPAAC), and the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation, PING! was formed.

As enrollment in PING! increased each year, it became clear that simply loaning instruments was not enough. The PING! board began to offer enrichment opportunities as well. In 2003, the Mentor Program was formed with 20 OPRF High School music students mentoring 20 PING! middle schoolers for one hour after school every other week during the school year. Over the next few years, PING! expanded its services to include the high school and, in addition

to providing band and orchestra instruments, began to fund private music lessons for students in grades 9-12. PING! held its first Enrichment Workshop for 4th and 5th graders in 2008, and at the urging of the Community Foundation, PING! offered its services to River Forest elementary students.

2013 was a milestone year for PING! celebrating 15 years of providing instruments and enrichment for low income students. The PING! program model was presented at the Illinois Music Education Association conference. PING! received the Oak Park Education Foundation Staszak Award, and enrollment reached an all-time high of more than 160 students in grades 4-12.

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PING! believes that participation in the arts is an essential and fundamental part of a child's education and should be available to all students regardless of family income.

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PING! continues to be a volunteer-run organization and every year provides instruments and enrichment to more than 150 students in school districts 90, 97, and 200. Each year, about 35 middle school students and high school mentors participate in the Mentor Program, thirty 4th and 5th graders attend a fall or spring enrichment workshop, eight to ten students receive scholarships for summer music camp, and an average of ten PING! high school students receive private music lessons.

PING! believes that participation in the arts is an essential and fundamental part of a child's education and should be available to all students regardless of family income. Their volunteer board could not accomplish this without the loyal support of their donors as well as organizations like OPAAC, the Rotary Club of Oak Park and River Forest, the 19th Century Charitable Association, and the Community Foundation. With this outstanding donor base and careful budgeting, PING! has not only provided musical instruments and music enrichment for low income students

for 17 years, but has been able to accrue a small surplus of funds as well. Looking to secure the future of music education for all students regardless of income, PING! has established an endowment fund with us. The goal is to grow this fund and eventually provide substantial endowed support for PING!'s programs.

There are more than thirty local organizations who have also established endowment funds with us. Endowed funds provide nonprofit organizations with a permanent and growing source of revenue, create an attractive repository for major and planned gifts and demonstrate the strength and stability of these organizations and their long-term commitment to their missions.

When a nonprofit organization establishes an endowment fund with us, we provide these services:

- Legal administration of the Fund.
- Receiving and processing additional assets for the Fund.
- Managing the investment of the Fund assets.
- Reinvesting Fund assets.
- Preparing and filing all tax returns.
- Scheduling and conducting an annual audit.
- Providing periodic investment statements of principal and available income.
- Distributing earnings to or for an organization for the benefit of its programs.
- Collaborating with an organization in connection with its planned giving program.

Of course, individual contributions to the PING! Fund or any of our endowed funds supporting local nonprofits are always welcomed. Visit our donation page at: <https://opr.fiphiview.com/opr/Donors/tabid/683/Default.aspx> to explore all the possibilities!



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to learn about our most recent grants, scholarships and  
initiatives – and to find out how you can contribute.

## Fund for Diversity Launched



Oak Park's diversity, one of the primary reasons people love living here, is largely due to the efforts of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center. Therefore, it is vital that the Center is able to continue funding its work in the near and distant future.

To do that, the Oak Park Regional Housing Center has established the Fund for Diversity at the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation. The endowment will provide a strong and stable base of ongoing support; with this type of endowment, funds are invested so that earnings can be allocated to the organization each year over the long term.

"Diversity is one of the key reasons people intentionally choose to live in Oak Park," says Kristin Carlson Vogen, president and CEO of the Community Foundation. "With our diversity, we are a more vibrant community. The Community Foundation is delighted to partner with the Housing Center to ensure that our diverse and vibrant community continues forever."

To learn more and/or to donate to the Fund please visit: <http://www.oprhc.org/fundfordiversity/>

## Our New Program Officer



Our Program Officer,  
Elizabeth Chadri

**Elizabeth Chadri** joined the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation as Program Officer on February 23rd. Prior to this, she worked at the MacArthur Foundation as Program Officer in the international program focusing on education and capacity building for conservation and

sustainable development. Her grant making experience includes strategy development, impact assessment and the management of multi-disciplinary grants. Additionally, she has had nonprofit program management experience in a diverse range of organizations based in Africa and the US. Originally from Kenya, Elizabeth has lived in Oak Park for over 11 years. She has a M.Ed. from Kenyatta University and an MSc in Training an HRM from University of Leicester and began her career as a high school Biology teacher. As Program Officer, Elizabeth is focusing on Impact Excellence with a series of programs and activities to benefit local nonprofits. Her e-mail is [echadri@oprfcf.org](mailto:echadri@oprfcf.org) and her phone number is 708-848-1560.



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