I have just completed my first year as the Chair of the Foundation’s Board of Directors and wanted to take a moment to look back and—more importantly—look forward with you.

As we experience the seemingly daily barrage of tragic news at the local, national and international level, it is easy to lose hope. Simultaneously, our personal focus is on our families, our friends, and our community. I have been amazed and thankful for the hope and resiliency we see and experience every day in spite of the bad news that surrounds us.

While we cannot and should not ignore the challenges around us, it is imperative that we acknowledge and support those individuals and organizations that are working (sometimes very quietly) to make Oak Park, River Forest and our neighboring communities a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

The Foundation has been on the forefront of this movement to improve our lives and the lives of our neighbors. Our president and CEO, Tony Martinez, Jr., and his staff have led the Foundation’s work with the perfect mix of leadership and humanity. We are thankful for Tony. And our staff. The Foundation has made progress in our efforts to fight racial injustice and to narrow the economic equity gap locally. But to paraphrase Robert Frost, “we still have miles to go before we sleep.”

We have completed our Community Needs Assessment initiative, which has allowed us to gain a better understanding of the competing priorities in our communities. A brief overview of the findings is included in this newsletter, and the full Community Voices Report is available online at oprfcf.org/community-voices. We also look forward to sharing the results with you later this summer in a series of public forums both online and in person.

In closing, on behalf of the Board and the Staff, I would like to thank those community members who have and continue to support the Foundation. I ask those of you who may be unfamiliar with our work to reach out to us to learn more about our mission. We need your engagement and the involvement of the whole community as we continue to move our region forward.

In partnership and service,

Bruce J. Wojack
Chair of the Board of Directors

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation wishes to extend special thanks to outgoing board chair Donna T. Myers and outgoing board members Ross Fasano, Janet Hanley, Wendell Rayburn, and Barbara Watkins for their years of service.
Supporting the dreams of our community’s children is a goal of many donors to the Foundation. The Kevin Bolin-John Cooper Scholarship Fund served this purpose for 20 years, providing scholarships to high school hockey players for their pursuit of higher education. The fund celebrated its final ceremony this past May with the awarding of two scholarships to graduating OPRF seniors David Andolina and Callum Dickel, as well as a $10,000 gift to the OPRF Hockey Club.

The fund was established by Pat Bolin in honor of her son Kevin, who died in a car accident on the way to a hockey tournament in 2001. Stan and Peg Cooper also contributed to the fund in memory of their son John, who died in similar circumstances in 1976. Both young men played as goalies on the hockey team, and were noted for their team spirit and strength of character. Scholarship winners demonstrate similar loyalty, commitment and leadership skills. Thirty-one students have received the scholarship since the fund’s inception. They have gone on to study at many institutions, including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Arizona State University, Clemson University, and the University of Minnesota.

“The hockey community has been so welcoming to me and the Coopers over the years,” says Bolin. An annual 5k run/walk raised funds for the scholarships, in addition to family contributions and investment management from the Foundation. Bolin appreciates what she calls a “wonderful” relationship with the Foundation for the past 20 years. She is also grateful to OPRF Hockey Club board members Tom Shipley and Jim Sierminski for their support with the 5k events, along with Mary T. Small and Linda Ryan for their roles on the scholarship selection committee.

Scholarship recipient Dickel will attend the University of North Dakota in the fall of 2022. He enjoyed the encouragement and bonding that he and his teammates found in the program.

“Something that is really important on the team is helping each other,” Dickel says. “When I was a freshman, the goalie took me under his wing, and when I became a junior and senior I wanted to do the same thing for others. We all help each other, giving our teammates rides, or finding opportunities to practice.”

This team interconnectivity echoes the community support facilitated by the Foundation and evident in the Oak Park-River Forest area.
Proviso Partners for Health (PP4H) serves Maywood, Bellwood, Broadview and Melrose Park. More than 30 partners make up this multi-sector coalition, including Loyola University Health System, Proviso Township Mental Health Commission, West Cook YMCA, and more. Together they work to promote community health, health equity, and transformational systems change.

Residents and community members drive the work, bringing their lived experience and firsthand knowledge to address their area’s unique needs. Proviso Township, an area already struggling in many ways, faced additional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. A grant from the Foundation’s Rapid Response and Recovery Fund provided critical support to the organization. According to Lena Hatchett, director of community and university partnerships at Loyola’s Stritch School of Medicine and co-founder of PP4H, the structure of the grant allowed for creativity and innovation in designing solutions to identified problems.

Kelley Gray, a PP4H staffer and co-lead of its Community Leadership Academy, saw how COVID-19 amplified the effects of racial trauma.

“I saw a need for black women to talk about this trauma,” Gray says. “I wanted to make a safe space for women to speak freely about what they feel.”

Gray formed a group called Radiant Vessels and began hosting weekly virtual gatherings for area residents to provide mutual support for each other. To further the work, she started a podcast called Tru You: A Storytelling Space for Self-Discovery. Together with her mother as co-host, Gray brings light to issues like black motherhood and generational silence, and monthly special guests from the community share their experiences and discuss what they need for racial healing.

Through these types of grassroots initiatives, PP4H is committed to addressing the gap of mental health services in the black community. The ongoing support of the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation and advocacy by neighbors helps ensure that meaningful change is within reach.

To discover how the Foundation supports nonprofits through grants, donor funds and training programs, visit oprcf.org or contact Elizabeth Chadri at 708-848-1560.
Race is the single most predictive indicator of successful outcomes in education, health, housing, safety, and nearly every other aspect of daily life in America. Racial equity is advanced in two ways: First, by identifying and eliminating policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race; and second, by establishing systems that prioritize change for communities of color in order to effect fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities for all.

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation has taken an honest look at philanthropy and its ability to address systemic racial inequities. We understand that our work must intentionally and comprehensively address the racial disparities that exist in order for all members of our community to thrive and prosper. This starts with learning and listening, and building trust within our community, to deeply and fully understand the many barriers and disparities that exist right here in our towns. This brief summary is just part of Community Voices, a full comprehensive community needs assessment commissioned by the Foundation in 2021 and completed July 2022.

**VISION**
A racially just society in which all members of our community thrive and prosper

**CORE VALUES**
- Equity
- Inclusivity
- Courage

**MISSION**
Unite community members to mobilize resources to advance a racially just society and equitable outcomes for residents of Oak Park, River Forest and surrounding communities

Methodology

Each community conversation included 8-12 individuals, most of whom (94%) have lived experience as people of color. Participants included people who have not historically been invited into such conversations, as well as community leaders and frontline staff from grassroots organizations serving those in need. Each focus group met twice over the project period. Ninety-eight community members participated in the conversations. Most of the meetings were held virtually due to concerns about COVID-19.

Participants came from the following townships: Oak Park, River Forest, Berwyn, Chicago (Austin, West Humboldt Park, Galewood), Cicero, and Proviso (Maywood, Bellwood, Broadview, Melrose Park).

Our facilitation approach emphasized the importance of listening first to align with our research objective of building trusting relationships. Focus group participants were often vulnerable, even reliving trauma, in their storytelling.

View the full report at: oprfcf.org/community-voices
What We Heard

All of the needs represented in this “word cloud” intersect and interrelate in a person’s daily life. This interconnectedness was clearly evident in our conversations with focus group participants, who often described multiple issues woven together, as you’ll read in their own words in the full report.

These needs all result from systems of discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, class, and other factors, which most drastically affect marginalized or at-risk community members. Of these, race is the overwhelming, overarching determinant for access to education, healthcare, wealth, and stability. Data supports what we heard. And potential solutions may be as intertwined as the issues we seek to address.

Racial equity means everyone has access to...

language access  safety  homeownership
mental health  green space  loans
representation  healthcare
education  community centers
housing  equal opportunity
parking  justice
wealth  grocery stores
reparations

The bigger the word or topic appears, the more often it was mentioned in focus group conversations.

RACIAL/ETHNIC MAKEUP OF WEST COOK COUNTY

The three maps below show the relative concentration of white, Black and Hispanic people in the west Cook region. When taken together, they reveal the lines of segregation — intentional or inadvertent — within our communities.

White, Non-Hispanic Population

Hispanic Population

Black Population

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year Estimate 2015-2019. Asian and Native American-Pacific Islander maps are not shown because population concentrations were below 1% in all census tracts.

15 Factors of Social Vulnerability

The Social Vulnerability Index was developed for the Centers for Disease Control to help public health officials and emergency response planners to identify areas most in need of assistance during a natural or man-made disaster. The index is based on 15 factors from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Below Poverty • Unemployed • Income Level
No High School Diploma

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION & DISABILITY

Aged 65 or Older • Aged 17 or Younger • Older than Age 5 with a Disability • Single-Parent Households

MINORITY STATUS & LANGUAGE

Minority • Speaks English “Less than Well”

HOUSING TYPE & TRANSPORTATION

Multi-Unit Structures • Mobile Homes
Crowding • No Vehicle • Group Quarters

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year Estimate 2015-2019. Asian and Native American-Pacific Islander maps are not shown because population concentrations were below 1% in all census tracts.

SOCIAL VULNERABILITY BY CENSUS TRACT

The dark-shaded areas are the most vulnerable.
The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation is pleased to announce the four latest additions to its board of directors.

**IV Ashton**, a resident of Oak Park, is committed to uniting technology and justice to serve vulnerable populations throughout the world. He began his legal career internationally, overseeing the development of a database tracking human rights violations in Kosovo, as well as several online tools for various ministries of justice throughout the Balkans.

In 1999, Ashton co-founded Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO), which provides legal training and support to pro bono attorneys and pro se litigants involved with the justice system. In 2001, he founded LegalServer, a web-based case management platform used by hundreds of nonprofit agencies and public defenders. Most recently, he created houston.ai, a web-based platform applying machine learning to streamline legal processes for agencies supporting individuals who cannot afford attorneys.

**Tiffiny Bolden** brings nearly two decades of experience in human resources, corporate learning and development initiatives, and diversity, equity and inclusion programs throughout the region. As the global head of human resources for Golin, a public relations agency with clients worldwide, Bolden serves as an advocate for clear communication and inclusive, welcoming cultural practices. In recent years, she has focused on supporting employees through the impact of COVID-19.

Bolden has a broad background in human resources across industry, as well as Illinois public school districts. Previously in leadership at Information Resources, she has also worked in executive finance roles with Medline Industries, Anixter, and Navman Wireless. She lives in Oak Park.

**Lisa Johnson** has an extensive history of community service. She serves on the board of United Way of Metropolitan Chicago and is an active member of the Chicago Network and the Economic Club of Chicago, and has previously served as a trustee of the Chicago Zoological Society, where she remains a governing member ambassador, and as president of the Chicago/Midwest chapter of the Turnaround Management Association, dedicated to turning around troubled companies.

Johnson recently joined Ceek Women’s Health as chief financial officer. Ceek focuses on improving health care for women through innovative products and devices. A renowned leader in the financial sector, she had a 35-year career at Wells Fargo, and was CFO of RareITi, an international startup focusing on rare disease therapies. Before joining RareITi, she was chief operating officer of Lamar Johnson Collaborative (LJC), the architecture and design firm she and her husband Lamar cofounded in 2017, which grew to 30 professionals and attained positive cash flow within its first year. She negotiated the sale of a majority interest in the firm and oversaw integration with the operations of its new parent entity. She and Lamar are longtime residents of northeast Oak Park.

With a decades-long devotion to community service, **Sarah Jolie** joins the Foundation board after serving on the Grants Committee for four years. A graduate of Oak Park public schools, she lived in Forest Park from 2003 to 2014 and now owns a two-flat in Oak Park with two other multi-generation residents.

Jolie is the owner and president of Hensley Company, a 100-year-old mailing and fulfillment company begun by her grandfather in 1921, now a certified woman-owned business. In 2021, Hensley was named to the prestigious Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America.

Jolie has also served on the boards of the Oak Park, River Forest and Forest Park United Way, Commercial Law League of America, and Chicago Postal Customer Council. She is the recipient of the 2021 Mail Professional Recognition Award given by the Chicago Postal Customer Council.

“We are delighted to welcome these dedicated individuals the Foundation’s board,” said OPRFCF President and CEO Antonio Martinez, Jr. “The breadth and depth of their experience and their enthusiasm for helping neighbors are tremendous assets to our organization and the Oak Park-River Forest area at large.”
Foundation Office Refreshed

After more than a decade of residing at 1049 Lake Street, the Foundation underwent a major office refresh this spring!

Prompted by generous donations of furniture from Byline Bank and fresh paint and new carpet from R.P. Fox and Associates, Foundation staff spent several weekends and after hours deep cleaning and reorganizing our home away from home. Long-serving board member Barbara Watkins gifted the Foundation two original pieces of art from her personal collection, which now grace our conference room walls. Interior designer and Oak Parker Sophie Eldred put all the finishing touches in place. We are incredibly grateful to these wonderful community members that helped create a space that is modern, warm, and inviting.

We welcome you to come visit us!

Foundation Welcomes Helen Morales as Development Associate

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation is pleased to announce Helen Morales has joined our team as a part-time development associate. She joins us following a full-time internship with the Pritzker Traubert Foundation.

Morales lives in Rogers Park but is very familiar with the western suburbs, having grown up in Lombard. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from the University of Illinois, and plans to pursue a master’s degree in Public Policy. In her free time she enjoys reading and music, and has played the flute for more than a decade.

"I could not be more excited to join such a motivated and exceptional team here at OPRFCF!" Morales says. "I am truly looking forward to learning more about the communities the Foundation serves, and being a part of the positive impact the Foundation has and will continue to make in the west Cook region."

Morales will help coordinate Foundation events and giving groups, including Women Leaders in Philanthropy, in addition to supporting development efforts and other donor services. She can be reached at hmorales@oprfcf.org or 708-848-1560.

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Cathy Craddock
"Making real change requires real community engagement, and it needs to be built by connecting with the people first."

— Austin resident & organizer

We invite you to attend one of our upcoming events where we will be sharing our community needs assessment, which reveals the most pressing needs in our area, what the data tells us, and how the power of our community will guide our future to a racially just society.

Learn more at oprfcf.org/community-voices