South Bend Symphony Receives Foundation’s Leighton Award

The Community Foundation honors the Symphony’s commitment to performance and community outreach with our $150,000 Leighton Award.

One of the best things about choosing the winner of the Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence is that it’s never an easy decision. We have so many incredible nonprofit organizations in our community that it’s always a challenge for our Leighton Committee to choose a single exemplar among them—but the process is always a great joy.

Our 2019 Leighton Award honors the exceptional work of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra.

Across the country, professional orchestras face difficult times. For many, subscriptions are down, and concert halls are dotted with empty seats. In order to succeed in the twenty-first century, orchestras need to challenge traditional models of performance, and engage new audiences—without sacrificing artistic quality.

The Symphony is committed to finding new ways to reach beyond the concert hall and connect with the community.

That’s exactly what the South Bend Symphony Orchestra is doing.

BEYOND THE CONCERT HALL

The Symphony is committed to finding new ways to reach beyond the concert hall, from its new “Happy Hour with the Symphony” events to its well-established Symphony-to-Go program, which brings small-ensemble performances to libraries, schools, and retirement homes. And it’s never afraid to try something new: This past year, the Symphony...
performed the National Anthem for the NHL Winter Classic at Notre Dame, reaching an audience of 80,000 plus three million TV viewers.

**EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT WORK** The Symphony continues to grow its investment in education and community engagement. It incorporates Carnegie Hall’s “Link Up” program with its annual Shein Family Young People’s Discovery Concerts, and it’s expanding its Artist-in-Residence program at Clay High School, the local fine arts magnet. New community partnerships are bearing fruit, too, including a 2020 collaboration with South Bend Civic Theatre to present *West Side Story* at the Morris Performing Arts Center.

Throughout, the Symphony has maintained its commitment to orchestral performance of the highest quality. Its Masterworks series includes a multi-year cycle of Beethoven symphonies, as well as world premieres by new composers.

**DEDICATION OF BOARD, STAFF** The dedication of the Symphony’s Board and staff is impressive. Although Executive Director Agnieszka Rakhmatullaev recently left her position, the Symphony made gains during her tenure—including hiring Music Director Alastair Willis, whose vision and charisma have energized the organization.

“Every day I ask myself, ‘What can I do to make South Bend better?’” —SBSO Music Director Alastair Willis

Leighton award. The Willis family recently moved to South Bend, underscoring the maestro’s commitment to our community.

**A SPECIAL LEIGHTON CONNECTION** Judd and Mary Lou Leighton were two of the Symphony’s most dedicated, generous supporters, which makes this award extra special for the Symphony.

“Every day I ask myself, ‘What can I do to make South Bend a better place?’” —SBSO Music Director Alastair Willis

Leighton interview process. The Willis family recently moved to South Bend, underscoring the maestro’s commitment to our community.
Across the county, America is turning gray—quickly. Our county is aging even faster than average, with 20% of residents already over age 60. To ensure that these seniors have everything they need to thrive, the Community Foundation created a major new grant opportunity through our Senior Living Initiative. After a six-month review process, our Senior Living Committee awarded a total of $1,550,000 to three local nonprofits.

Older adults with dementia and their caregivers need support—and that’s why we’re funding the REAL Service’s creation of the Care Connections Center at Milton Village with a $750,000 grant. This exciting new model of care for patients with Alzheimer’s and dementia includes a day center “village” that incorporates reminiscence therapy—which draws on personal and community history to help seniors rediscover long-term memories—as well as a hub of services for caregivers including education, respite, and more.

Often, the best way to connect with vulnerable seniors is in their own homes. That’s what the St. Joseph Health System’s Older Adult Community Healthworker Initiative does. Through home visits, SJHS Community Healthworkers help seniors access resources that contribute to their health, safety, and independence. Our $500,000 grant will allow the program to broaden its base of service to include seniors who are referred by four additional agencies: HealthLinc, Indiana Health Center, Oaklawn, and REAL Services.

Habitat for Humanity of St. Joseph County’s Aging in Place Senior Living Initiative has already helped more than 50 seniors with major home repairs, and this $300,000 grant will help them serve even more. Because of this program, seniors are able to stay in their own homes longer—which is where the vast majority of them want to be. In addition, Habitat for Humanity is spearheading a new collaboration among a larger group of organizations that help seniors connect with related services.

The Community Foundation’s Senior Living Committee chose to fund all three of these efforts because each brings a unique approach to critical issues faced by local seniors. Also, these grantee organizations are developing stronger relationships with each other through these projects—which paves the way for future collaborations.

“We believe the connections made will provide benefit beyond just these projects,” says Angela Workman, the Community Foundation’s Vice President, Program.

Want to learn more? We’ve posted a GREAT short video about them on our Facebook page: Facebook.com/CommunityFoundationSJC.
Collaborating to Improve the Community: Bowman Creek Educational Ecosystem

With the help of a $25,000 Special Project challenge grant from the Community Foundation, Riley High School engineering students are improving a resource in their own backyard: Bowman Creek.

In partnership with the City of South Bend and Notre Dame’s Center for Civic Innovation, students from Riley, Purdue, and other schools in the region have placed sensors in the creek to monitor its water levels, generating data that can help the City prepare for potential future flooding. They’ve also created a weather station at the creek with a public dashboard. During the summer, students worked to beautify the creek, adding native plants to the banks.

For Riley junior Zavion Heron, his experience with the Bowman Creek Educational Ecosystem—or BCe2, as the students call it—has transformed the way he thinks about engineering and what it can accomplish.

“I want to see what else I can learn,” Heron says, “and how else I can make my town better.”

You can learn more about the Community Foundation’s grant-making programs at cfsjc.org/grants.

Stretch Your Charitable Dollars

You can “stretch” your philanthropic giving by taking advantage of matching grant opportunities, which increase your impact on the charity or cause that matters to you. Currently, the Community Foundation has three matching grant opportunities:

- The Judd Leighton Foundation Challenge Grant matches your gift dollar-for-dollar to support the renovation and expansion of the St. Joseph County Public Library’s downtown branch.
- The Lilly Endowment is providing a 2-for-1 match for all gifts to our Community Endowment Fund. That’s the fund that supports our initiative work and grants to local charities, giving us the flexibility to respond to needs as they change over time. This 2-for-1 match makes your gift worth three times its initial value.
- Any gifts to the South Bend Symphony’s endowed fund with the Community Foundation will be matched dollar-for-dollar as part of the Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence (see story p. 1).

To take advantage of any of these three matching grant opportunities, visit cfsjc.org/give.