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Unity Foundation of La Porte County Awarded \$150,000 Lilly GIFT VII Leadership Grant

LA PORTE COUNTY, IN — Unity Foundation of La Porte County has received a Community Leadership Grant of \$150,000 as part of the seventh phase of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT VII) initiative. With the grant, the Unity Foundation will be taking the next steps to continue the Vibrant Communities of La Porte County Initiative. Next steps include sharing the Action Agenda with the many communities in La Porte County, with the goal of getting others to implement parts of the plan they deem important. The funds will also go to begin implementation of the two top issues identified: Conduct a housing study to create a housing action plan and to strengthen our entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Unity Foundation is one of 87 foundations in Indiana receiving grants through this round of GIFT VII grantmaking. Lilly Endowment created GIFT in 1990 to help local communities in Indiana develop the philanthropic capacity to identify local needs and challenges. It launched GIFT VII in 2018 and made available a total of \$125 million to help foundations strengthen their leadership capacities in the towns, cities and counties they serve.

“This support from Lilly Endowment Inc. serves as the wind beneath our wings as we look to implement key items that arose from our community conversations.” said Maggi Spartz, Unity Foundation President.

As part of GIFT VII, Unity was awarded a planning grant of \$75,000 in 2019 to convene nearly 1,000 local residents to identify, prioritize and assess opportunities and challenges in La Porte County. Unity teamed up with the La Porte County Convention and Visitors Bureau to lead this effort. Through a series of Vibrant Communities town hall meetings and community conversations with diverse groups of people, lack of quality housing and tangible resources for entrepreneurs to start and expand businesses quickly emerged as top priorities.

In March 2020, Unity was invited to apply for a GIFT VII Community Leadership Grant to implement strategies and activities identified during the planning period. Data from the Vibrant Communities Action Agenda and the Northwest Indiana Forum's “Ignite the Region” report helped drive the proposal. The Unity team worked tirelessly to complete the proposal, which was submitted on March 12, 2020 the day they began working remotely due to COVID.

Unity also partnered with the Lake County Community Foundations, Legacy and Crown Point, to explore how philanthropy could play a role in fostering economic and entrepreneurial development in the region. As a result, a new entrepreneurial resource tool, NWI Biz Hub was launched on Nov. 12 at the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center's Annual E-Day Awards event, with nearly 60 regional resource partners. \$30,000 of the \$150,000 will be used to bolster regional small business supports, particularly important during the pandemic.

"Before the pandemic we could see that supporting our entrepreneurs and small businesses was a vital long term strategy. It's especially true now. We are thrilled to collectively move forward thanks to the incredible generosity of Lilly Endowment, Inc." said Shannon Walker, Unity Foundation Vice President.

[Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly, Sr. and his sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. Although the gifts of stock remain a financial bedrock of the Endowment, it is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders' wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion. The Endowment funds significant programs throughout the United States, especially in the field of religion. However, it maintains a special commitment to its founders' hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana foundations can play in their communities; and 3) to encourage and support the efforts of current and past Lilly Endowment Community Scholars to engage with each other and with Indiana business, governmental, educational, nonprofit and civic leaders to improve the quality of life in Indiana generally and in local communities throughout the state.

Since 1992, Unity Foundation of La Porte County has served donors, nonprofits and local communities. As La Porte County's community foundation, it manages approximately \$32 million in assets, administers more than 325 charitable funds, and has distributed more than \$21 million through direct grants and scholarships. The Council on Foundations has deemed Unity Foundation in compliance with all Indiana and national ethical and operating standards for community foundations. Unity Foundation's mission is to strengthen La Porte County now and forever by building permanent endowments; providing leadership; offering philanthropic vehicles for everyone; and, being a catalyst for social and economic vitality. For more information, please visit www.uflc.net or call 219-879-0327.