

What are Community Foundations Anyway?

By John Samuel Graves, III

Community foundations have existed in the United States since around 1914. According to one of my favorite websites, Wikipedia, "Community foundations (CFs) are instruments of civil society designed to pool donations into a coordinated investment and grant making facility dedicated primarily to the social improvement of a given place." Their mission is broadly defined to improve the quality of life in a specific community. They are supported by a broad range of private as well as public donors and seek philanthropic contributions primarily from inside the community. They are governed by local boards, and they employ professional investors to safeguard and grow the funds entrusted to them. They are staffed with professional grant making personnel to ensure that the various funds established with them are properly managed for conformity to the original charitable goals of each fund.



Together the staff of **Community Foundation of the Lowcountry** and **Hopeful Horizons** celebrate a recent grant awarded during the **#LowcountryVolunteers Challenge**. Grantmaking is just one of the many things community foundations do to support nonprofits in the community.

Community Foundation of the Lowcountry was established in 1994 and is located on Hilton Head Island. According to their website, www.cf-lowcountry.org:

Community foundations are tax-exempt public charities serving thousands of people who share a common interest—improving the quality of life in their area.

Individuals, families, businesses, and organizations create charitable funds that help their region meet the challenges of changing times. Community foundations invest and administer these funds.

Community foundations make grants, but they are more than grantmakers. They raise money, but are not primarily a fundraiser. They are involved in leadership activities, but are not the community's think tank.

Community foundations play valuable community service roles. They nurture the nonprofit sector as a whole, and help it to integrate and grow. They promote organized philanthropy by individuals, corporations and organizations. They recognize change and convene leadership to respond to it.



Mary Elizabeth Graves (1921-2009)

The **Mary Elizabeth Graves Endowment** is one of the many charitable funds at **Community Foundation of the Lowcountry**. My Aunt Mary was the last Graves family member to live in the Graves House on Calhoun Street in Old Town Bluffton. The home had been built in 1908 by her grandfather, George Sewell Guilford, and has long been listed as a contributing structure in **Bluffton's Historic District**. The Graves family had lived there for over 100 years. At one time many members of the Graves family—and many of their cousins—lived in Bluffton's original square mile. Thankfully, the Graves House has recently been completely restored by Bluffton's United Methodist Church.

When Aunt Mary died in 2009 I looked for some kind of permanent means by which she—and the Graves family—could be remembered. I decided that a community foundation endowment would be the perfect way for her to have a long lasting, visible impact on the welfare of the town of Bluffton and the immediately surrounding areas.

The **Mary Elizabeth Graves Endowment Fund** addresses the concerns dearest to my Aunt Mary's heart: *Animal Rights Advocacy within Beaufort County with a preference for supporting nonprofit organizations serving the town of Bluffton; Historical Preservation, Environmental Protection and Conservation Advocacy and Services in the area defined as the Town of Bluffton, excluding Palmetto Bluff.*

Over the last several years since her death grants have been made from her endowment to the *Bluffton Historical Preservation Society*, the *Palmetto Animal League*, and just recently a grant to the fund to restore the *Bluffton AME Chapel*. Her fund also made a grant to the *Bluffton War Memorial Monument*. My Aunt Mary's youngest brother, Frederick Wallace Graves, died in the Korean War. His name is on that recently erected monument.

Anyone may contribute to the **Mary Elizabeth Graves Endowment Fund**. Just search for it under that name on the **Community Foundation of the Lowcountry** website, www.cf-lowcountry.org. Go to their "Giving Through the Foundation" tab and click on their "View our Funds" menu. **Community Foundation of the Lowcountry** lists over 270 Funds on their website. All of the funds accept charitable donations. It is an excellent way for someone to contribute to a favorite local cause without actually setting up their own fund. All contributions are tax deductible, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your dollars will be expertly managed and thoughtfully disbursed over the years for worthy projects in Bluffton, Hilton Head Island and the surrounding areas.

Denise K. Spencer is President and CEO of **Community Foundation of the Lowcountry**. **Emmy Rooney** is Vice President for Development and Donor Services. **Jean Heyduck** is Vice President for Marketing and Communications. **Anita Miles** is their Administrative Assistant. They can be reached at 843.681.9100.

The author is grateful for the support and help he received with this article from **Jean Heyduck** and **Emmy Rooney**.