

WEST MIDLAND FAMILY CENTER Family Focus

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Thriving, Giving, Growing ... Together

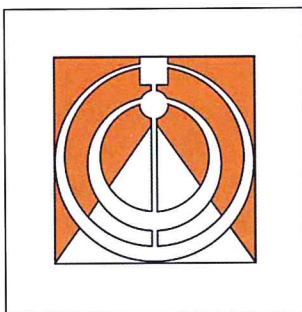
Fall 2015

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Foundation Extends Matching Grant

In 2013, WMFC received a three-year (2013 - 2015), dollar-for-dollar matching grant from **The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation**. The foundation grant was a challenge for our community of supporters to increase giving while encouraging contributions from new donors. In the first two years the challenge grant prompted 107 first-time donors and 461 previous donors to contribute. Clearly, one dollar granted for every dollar contributed is outstanding incentive!



The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation extends matching grant until 2018.

Currently, WMFC is in the final months of this three year challenge. With outstanding community support, WMFC has reached an imposing annual goal in each of the past two years. With continued support, we hope to do so again.

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WMFC Preschoolers Explore and Learn in the Great Outdoors

In the last decade it has been well documented that children who spend time in nature rich environments are positively impacted in social, academic and physical ways.

Research confirms **West Midland Family Center's (WMFC)** belief that playing outside is extremely beneficial to children and that time spent in nature enhances the overall learning experience of a child. As a result, WMFC preschool children spend a good part of each day outside exploring nature.

WMFC is located in a lovely rural environment filled with large wide

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Carolyn Langlois (pictured in center) keeps a watchful eye on students.

Gateway and WMFC Celebrate 15 Years

In 2001, representatives from **Gateway Martial Arts** approached then WMFC Recreation Director, **Renee Allen**, to discuss the possibility of a partnership. "Gateway was looking to expand classes," explained **Carolyn Langlois**,

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“Why do I Support West Midland Family Center?” ...Anne Pankratz

Why do I support West Midland Family Center as a volunteer and a donor? My husband David and I have supported the Center financially for many years. We have seen our dollars go further to help people in need because **Greg Dorrien** and his team have genuine, loving relationships



Anne Pankratz

with the people they are helping and they are passionate about enhancing the quality of life for everyone in the community in which they serve. They get to know their neighbors. They listen to them. They care for them. And they effectively use the Center's

resources to make long lasting positive differences in their lives.

Five years ago I got more involved when WMFC staff members and I shared a vision. We believe that if a portion of the people with means in this country would enter into a genuine, mutually respecting, empowering relationship with an individual or family in need, the poverty problem in this country could be solved. It brought great joy to me to work with the WMFC staff to help bring this vision to reality for **Midland County**. Though this is a work in progress, programs have been impacted by our efforts and we continue to recruit people who are interested in making a difference by developing relationships with individuals and families in West Midland County.

As a board member, I have learned about the many outstanding programs and people at WMFC. I have seen staff offer to cut their own salaries so that the programs that strengthen families and better

lives can survive. I have listened to the contagious passion of Greg, his staff, and the WMFC Board Members and have been impressed with the huge impact they make with each dollar. The common thread through all of the success is the genuine, loving relationships amongst staff, and between staff and the people of the community they serve and beyond. That makes the difference. And that is why I will continue to give a portion of my time and our money to West Midland Family Center.

*Anne and David Pankratz have been married for 30 years and have three grown children, Steve, Mike and Kristen. After working 10 years as a chemical engineer, Anne retired to devote her time and talents to her family, her church, and other nonprofit organizations. She is currently on the board at WMFC and is the acting president of the board of **GenOn Ministries**, a national organization that equips faith communities and families to develop lifelong Christian disciples through intergenerational relationships.*

WMFC and Gateway Celebrate 15 Years

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Gateway Instructor and WMFC Site Coordinator, “WMFC seemed like a good fit.” For the past 15 years, on every Tuesday night, throughout the year, Gateway instructors have volunteered their time to bring free martial arts classes to the people of western Midland County.

“It is rare to find martial arts classes that are free,” explained **Jillian Spreeman, WMFC Recreation Director**, “people pay a lot of money to participate in classes like these...it's wonderful that Gateway continues to provide this opportunity to those in our community. The instructors

invest so much of themselves into what they do and ask for nothing in return.”

All Gateway Instructors are part of the communities in which they teach. They believe that volunteering in their community gives them an opportunity to invest in others and



Gateway Martial Arts Instructors and Students

ultimately improve individual lives. Martial Arts promotes mental and physical fitness, develops skills and teaches discipline and self defense. Setting personal challenges as well as developing and executing a plan to achieve those challenges requires Gateway students and instructors to practice frequently. Martial Arts is a great activity that family members can participate in together! For more information about Gateway Martial Arts please drop by any Tuesday night and speak with one of the instructors, or contact WMFC Recreation Director, Jillian Spreeman.

Preschools Explore and Learn in the Great Outdoors

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Playing outside helps children to improve their balance and coordination.

open wooded spaces in which children can explore and play. The trails and fallen trees throughout the WMFC properties lend themselves to the practice of physical skills, such as balancing, running, leaping, and jumping. A

teepee in the middle of the WMFC “woods” helps stimulate the children’s imagination and creativity.



The great outdoors is a living classroom in which children can explore and learn at their own pace.

Exploring the streams and plant life often leads to the discovery of the tiny world of insects and other woodland creatures but learning through nature doesn’t end when the children return indoors to their classrooms.

WMFC preschool teachers also bring nature into the classroom. Items found in nature are gathered up by the children and brought inside to be used in **STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering and Mathematics)** classroom activities and learning. Students collect leaves, acorns, sticks and rocks to take back to their classrooms where they spend time stacking, sorting, classifying and counting the various items. “Nature-based preschools fuse early childhood with environmental education to develop a child’s lifelong connection to the natural world through developmentally appropriate activities,” states **Rachel Larimore, Chippewa Nature Center Director of Education.**

The **Audubon Nature Preschool** states that “Children are born naturalists. They explore the world

with all of their senses, experiment in the environment, and communicate their discoveries to those around them.” WMFC preschool will continue to bring nature into the classroom and the classroom into nature in the years ahead.



Children bring items inside to stack, count, sort, organize and classify.

Foundation Extends Matching Grant

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And ...there’s more.....

“We were thrilled to learn and are proud to announce that under the watchful eye of **Mr. Mike Whiting President, The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation**, this challenge grant has been extended for an additional three years, until 2018”, stated **Greg Dorrien, WMFC Executive Director.** “I feel blessed to provide human services in

Midland County. In fact, I have often said that this is the *only* place that I would ever consider doing so.”

“The generosity of the Midland community is like none other,” continued Dorrien, “I am amazed by the good will demonstrated by individuals and families and by the Foundation’s steadfast support of West Midland Family Center’s

mission. We are so happy to have this opportunity to welcome new donors and we are very appreciative of those who have been part of the west midland **FAMILY** for so many years. Our gratitude is immeasurable.”



Greg Dorrien,
WMFC Executive Director



Arthur and Melissa Oakes dance the night away at the WMFC "Over the Rainbow" date night. WMFC Family Services hosts three date nights per year.

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Volunteer Spotlight - Gina Mencarelli

Gina Mencarelli came to the West Midland Family Center (WMFC), in May 2015, as an intern in the WMFC Family Services Department. During her internship, Gina participated in preschool home visits, helped market special events and helped facilitate the WMFC Playgroup. "I love West



Gina Mencarelli

Midland," exclaimed Gina, "I love the staff and the families; they are like family to me! The staff is genuine, positive and they want to help. I love working with the families...they are awesome."

When Gina's internship ended in August 2015, Gina stayed on as a volunteer. To date Gina has volunteered over 80 hours in many different departments at the Center. She often lends an extra pair of hands or helps to cover staff breaks in childcare. In addition, any time there is a **WMFC Family Services Department** event, you can always count on Gina to volunteer.

Recently Gina volunteered at the "Over the Rainbow" parent date night. She went above and beyond in helping out with the event, even dressing up as Glinda, the good witch. Gina's positive, hardworking nature helps to ensure the successful outcome of the many WMFC events that she volunteers for. WMFC could not do what we do without the dedication of amazing volunteers like Gina!

Gina will graduate in December 2015 from Central Michigan University with a Bachelor of Applied Arts, majoring in Family Studies and minoring in Childhood Development. She hopes to develop and implement programs in non profit organizations just like WMFC.



Gina and other staff members dressed up as Wizard of Oz characters for "Over the Rainbow" Date Night.