



Together For Good



Lincoln
Community
FOUNDATION

SPRING 2026



04 Donor Profile



06 Growing Connections



09 Weaver Awards



10 Mission Investing



12 Give to Lincoln

Greetings:

When the first signs of spring start to unfold around us, I'm reminded that growth doesn't happen overnight. It takes care, commitment and a community willing to dig in and cultivate something bigger than itself.

At Lincoln Community Foundation, that's exactly what we see every day.

This year, we celebrate the 15th anniversary of Give to Lincoln Day – a powerful example of what happens when a community comes together with shared purpose.

What began as a simple idea in 2012 has blossomed into a movement, raising more than \$75 million for local nonprofits and affirming that generosity, at any level, means so much.

Year after year, Lincoln demonstrates that when we give together, we grow stronger together.

In this issue of Together for Good, you'll learn more about our work in action.

At Prairie Pines, a unique partnership is preserving not just land, but a place where relationships grow – between neighbors, cultures and generations. It's a tangible reminder that when we invest in shared spaces, we strengthen the fabric of our community.

You'll also meet Ray and Carolyn Zeisset, whose thoughtful approach to giving reflects a lifetime of cultivating what matters most to them – their faith, continuous learning and the “things that make us human.” Their story shows that generosity isn't defined by size, but by intention and consistency.

And through our mission investments to nonprofits like NeighborWorks Lincoln, you'll see how we are planting seeds for the long-term. By using innovative tools to expand access to housing and opportunity, we are ensuring a flourishing future for all.

Each story reflects a different and unique way we help Lincoln's nonprofits – by convening partners, investing in resources and building connections that allow good work to take root and expand. Thank you for joining with us on this journey.



Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracy".

Tracy Edgerton,
President



Pictured on front cover (left to right): Mohammad Alzamel, farmer, Community Crops at Prairie Pines, Shahab Bashar, Farm Program Coordinator, Family Service Lincoln/Community Crops and Saeed Salo, farmer, Community Crops at Prairie Pines



Lincoln Community Foundation Recognized as Family-Friendly Workplace

Exciting news – LCF recently received certification as a Family-Friendly Workplace! The new program by Lincoln Littles and Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development recognizes employers who demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting working families with young children, implement family-friendly workplace practices for their employees and help make Lincoln a great place to live, work and play by prioritizing family well-being and early childhood support.

“Working parents are often faced with immense challenges,” said President Tracy Edgerton. “This certification reflects our ongoing commitment as an employer to building a workplace culture that enables our team to thrive both inside and outside the office.”

The Lincoln Family-Friendly Workplace Certification lifts up policies and practices that businesses can implement to support working parents such as childcare assistance, flexible work scheduling and paid/unpaid leave. Employers that meet at least 7 out of 10 qualifying criteria receive the Lincoln Family-Friendly Workplace Certification.

“Lincoln Community Foundation has been a longtime champion for innovative childcare solutions,” said Lincoln Littles Executive Director Anne Brandt. “While supporting the broader community, they also consider their employees in a holistic sense. We’re grateful for their leadership and commitment to improving access to both employment and childcare.”

Future applications will be reviewed quarterly by the Lincoln Littles Board of Advisors Engagement Committee. **Learn more about the program at SelectLincoln.org.**

Welcome New Staff & Board Members



We’re pleased to introduce **Daniel Russell** as LCF’s new **Senior Philanthropic Advisor**. In this role, Daniel will focus on

building long-term philanthropic relationships with an emphasis on legacy and planned gifts. He comes to LCF with more than a decade of experience in charitable governance, donor stewardship and community-facing leadership – most recently with Nebraska nonprofit, Stand For Schools, where he served as Deputy Executive Director.

Additionally, LCF welcomed six new members to its board of directors this February: Yohance Christie, City of Lincoln; Shannon Harner, Nebraska Investment Finance Authority; Alyssa Martin, Nelnet; Max Rodenburg, NEBCO, Inc. and The Abel Foundation; John Skretta, Lincoln Public Schools and David Spinar, RBC Wealth Management.

Officers for 2026 include board chair, Lauren Pugliese, M-One Capital; vice-chair, John Olsson, Olsson; treasurer, Susie Keisler-Munro, Assurity; secretary, Brett Ebert, Ball, Loudon, Ebert, & Brostrom, LLC; and past chair, Mark Hesser, Pinnacle Bank.



YOHANCE CHRISTIE



SHANNON HARNER



ALYSSA MARTIN



MAX RODENBURG



JOHN SKRETTA



DAVID SPINAR



DONOR PROFILE

Ray and Carolyn Zeisset

Fostering what makes us human through qualified charitable distributions

For Dr. Ray and Carolyn Zeisset, giving back to their community has always been more about scale than size.

“The small gifts are how you start to get involved,” said Carolyn. “They invest you in the causes and organizations that speak to you.”

“That’s really our philosophy,” agreed Ray. “We never considered ourselves major givers, but we want to help in the ways that we can.”

Their story started in Newton, Kansas when they were just high school students. Ray had moved to town with his family after his father took a ministry role in the church Carolyn attended. He noticed her right away.

“She was the one that would smile and say hello to me.”

After completing his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Illinois and an initial job in Danville, Ray received an offer to join the Psychology Department at the Lincoln Regional Center (LRC) in 1967.

At the time, Ray and Carolyn had been married for six years and had a new baby in tow. Lincoln provided an ideal location for a young family,

and the Regional Center offered an opportunity for Ray to be on the leading edge of mental health resource development.

What was meant to be a three-year stint at LRC turned into more than 27. In addition to a variety of clinical and administrative roles at the Center, he helped develop mental health clinics in several Southeast Nebraska counties. He was a founder of the Lincoln Samaritan Counseling Center and taught in the Counseling program at Doane University for 20 years.

From preschool students to adult learners – Carolyn invested her time and talents as a teacher in some capacity for her entire career. She developed curriculum for public education, churches, businesses, nonprofit organizations and universities.

After more than 70 years together, Ray and Carolyn’s philanthropy mirrors their personal and professional paths.

Faith has always been an important part of their lives together. They invest their generosity in their church while also supporting basic

needs, early learning and the arts and humanities.

As Carolyn puts it, “the things that make us human.”

Early on, Ray and Carolyn turned to the Lincoln Community Foundation as the home for their charitable giving. They’ve established their legacy plans and several funds including their donor advised fund, field of interest funds and a Lincoln Forever Fund. The latter provides long-term flexible support for the future needs of our community.

“We may not know what the future will bring, but we trust that the Foundation will continue to have a pulse on the needs of our community when we’re not here,” said Ray.

For the past several years, Ray and Carolyn have also utilized Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) from their IRAs to support their favorite causes.

The federal government requires you to withdraw and pay taxes on a portion of your fully taxable IRA fund balance when you reach a certain age. However, by using

“

Get to know the team at the Foundation and let them get to know you. They can help you tailor your giving to what is right for you.

- Carolyn Zeisset

”

a QCD, those funds may be distributed directly to charitable organizations without paying taxes on the amount transferred.

“As our financial advisor pointed out – why pay taxes when you need to take required distributions, if your estate plan calls for major charitable gifts,” explained Ray. “By donating our required distributions, we save taxes and get to see benefits of our giving now. It’s not a hard process once you learn the basics.”

With Give to Lincoln Day just around the corner, Ray and Carolyn plan to take advantage of an IRA QCD to support the 15th annual event.

Give to Lincoln Day appeals to Ray and Carolyn’s outlook that community care is a common bond among people of all socio-economic and cultural levels.

“I think one thing that makes Give to Lincoln successful and sustainable is that the Foundation encourages and makes it possible to give small gifts,” shared Carolyn. “People can give what is comfortable for them and know that their gift combined with others can have a significant impact.”

Ray and Carolyn encourage folks to take the first steps on their giving journey by starting small and leaning into the expertise of the Lincoln Community Foundation.

“Get to know the team at the Foundation and let them get to know you,” said Carolyn. “They can help you tailor your giving to what is right for you.”

“Growing up in small towns, we feel that Lincoln has that same culture of people helping people,” Ray continued. “We’re a small town at heart. Carolyn and I have been provided with some incredible opportunities here and we’re proud to give back to the community that supported us.”

Participate in Give to Lincoln Day via IRA QCDs

The 15th annual giving event benefiting local nonprofits kicks off May 1 and builds up to Lincoln’s One Big Day of Giving on Thursday, May 28. Eligible donors can now use a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from their IRAs to support their favorite local causes during Give to Lincoln Day.

If you have an IRA and would like to make a QCD to support this year’s Give to Lincoln Day, please follow these steps:

- 1. Decide the total amount you wish to donate** with your IRA QCD for Give to Lincoln Day.
- 2. Contact your IRA administrator** to request a check for this amount from your IRA as a QCD. Checks must be made payable and mailed to LCF.

Lincoln Community Foundation
Attn: Rhonda Page
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 100
Lincoln, NE 68508

Please ask your administrator to include your name and “QCD” in the memo line. Checks must be received at the Foundation by May 28 to count towards the event.

- 3. Select the nonprofit(s) you’d like to donate to.** All participating nonprofits can be found on GiveToLincoln.com.
- 4. Complete the IRA QCD form** (available to download on LCF.org) with your selected nonprofit(s) name and amount of your donation(s). Your donation(s) should equal the total amount of your QCD check. Please note there is a \$100 minimum donation per organization. Forms may also be requested by contacting Rhonda Page at 402-474-2345 or rhondap@lcf.org.
- 5. Return the completed form to the Foundation by Friday, May 15.**



For more information on IRA QCDs and Give to Lincoln Day, contact Rhonda Page at 402-474-2345 or rhondap@lcf.org.



Yazidi farmers at the Community Crops farming area of Prairie Pines

A Sanctuary for Growing Connections

Sue Kohles stands on the edge of the 145-acre Prairie Pines Nature Preserve, looking out over a landscape that is both a relic of Nebraska's past and a blueprint for its future. To her, this land is more than just a collection of trees and tallgrass; it is a sanctuary.

As Lincoln continues to grow, Sue knows that one day the city's development will likely surround this refuge. But thanks to a historic strategic alignment between three local nonprofits and a critical boost from the Lincoln Community Foundation, Prairie Pines is

being anchored as a permanent sanctuary for the community.

A Vision Fulfilled

For years, Sue has served as the manager for Prairie Pines Partners, a nonprofit born from the vision of Walt and Virginia Bagley. The Bagleys, who began planting trees here in 1959, always intended for the land to be a site of conservation and education. But the path to fulfilling that legacy was complex.

The property was previously owned by the University of Nebraska Foundation and managed by the University of Nebraska. When the

university decided to divest from the property, a unique provision in the Bagleys' original agreement was triggered: Wachiska Audubon Society was given the first chance to take ownership.

"It's a big move for us," says Mark Brohman, Executive Director of Wachiska Audubon. "We are thrilled to continue Walt and Virginia's vision."

This transition of ownership represented a massive shift in responsibility, moving the daily stewardship of the woodland and grassland habitat directly into the hands of local conservationists.



Manager of Prairie Pines Partners Sue Kohles

Strategic Alignment in the Soil

While Wachiska and Prairie Pines Partners jointly manage the land and Prairie Pines Partners focuses on education and public access, a third piece of the puzzle makes the preserve truly unique: Community Crops. Since 2013, the preserve has hosted an "incubator farm," a concept that allows new farmers - many of whom are refugees and immigrants - to gain land access and business experience.

Megan McGuffey of Community Crops explained that the five-acre farm plot at Prairie Pines is a literal lifesaver for specialty crop producers.

"Land access is extremely expensive and difficult," McGuffey said. "With an incubator farm, you're sharing resources."

For the Yazidi community and other new Americans in Lincoln, the farm is more than a business;

it is a sanctuary where they can grow culturally significant produce, like Armenian cucumbers, garden cress and green eggplant. This partnership allows these farmers to rebuild a cultural food shed right here in Lincoln, selling produce to local Mediterranean markets and feeding their own communities.

The Open Door to Sustainability

Transitioning from a large university system to a co-managed model between independent nonprofits created immediate financial hurdles. To bridge this gap, LCF stepped in with an Open Door Grant.

The funding was vital for:

- **STEWARDSHIP:** Managing 145 acres of habitat, including removing hazardous dead trees.
- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** Mowing trails and maintaining safe recreational spaces for the 3,000 visitors who walk the grounds annually.
- **CAPACITY:** Supporting the transition of management responsibilities to ensure the preserve remains stable and secure.

This support is a direct investment in the Connections pillar of Prosper Lincoln, which champions the idea that all people thrive when they are woven into the fabric of their community.

"Our role is to convene, connect and catalyze," said LCF President Tracy Edgerton. "We don't run every program, but we invest in the infrastructure and relationships that allow good ideas to grow - and we support the people closest to the work."

The sense of belonging at Prairie Pines extends to a robust team of volunteers who treat the land as their own. To Sue, these supporters are as vital to the ecosystem as the trees and tallgrass themselves; they represent the Connections pillar in action, proving that a community thrives when its members are personally invested in preserving their shared home.

By providing a common ground where diverse groups - from visiting children to Yazidi farmers - intersect, Prairie Pines serves as a vital engine for social cohesion.

As Sue emphasizes, the preserve isn't just a place to observe nature; it is a shared neighborhood asset that fosters a sense of belonging, proving that when we protect our local "green postage stamps," we are actually strengthening the bonds that hold our community together.

continued on page 8



Wachiska Audubon Society Executive Director Mark Brohman



Community Crops farmers with their tomato harvest at Prairie Pines Nature Preserve

A Future Rooted in Reconciliation

The collaboration continues to deepen. This time last year, Prairie Pines became the site of an Indigenous garden in partnership with the Otoe-Missouria Tribe. Tribal members, the original stewards of this land, now return to plant traditional medicines, tobacco and beans, marking a milestone in reconciliation and healing.

For Sue, Mark and the team at Community Crops, the preserve is a testament to what happens when nonprofits stop working in silos and start working in sync.

Together, they are ensuring that even as the city grows around it, Prairie Pines will remain a place where "the wild meets the unwild," and where every resident of Lincoln can find a connection to the natural world.



Community Crops farming area at Prairie Pines Nature Preserve

Lincoln Community Foundation Selected as a 2026 Community Host for the Weaver Awards

Local partnership will help lift up neighbors by building trust, belonging and connection

Lincoln Community Foundation has been selected as one of 25 Community Host organizations from across the country for the 2026 Weaver Awards, a national initiative of Weave: The Social Fabric Project at the Aspen Institute.

The Weaver Awards are part of a constellation of activities designed to celebrate and support weavers – everyday neighbors who are building relationships, strengthening belonging and weaving trust into the social fabric of their communities.

Each Community Host receives \$225,000 in startup funding, along with training, tools, technical assistance and ongoing support from Weave. This partnership represents a four-year commitment to our community, signaling Weave's belief in the strength, creativity and leadership already alive here. The first cycle of Weaver Awards launches in fall 2026.

As a Community Host, LCF will build a culture of weaving in Lincoln by:

- Identifying local weavers and sharing their stories with our community
- Launching a local Weaver Awards program, distributing 20+ microgrants each year for four years to individuals and small nonprofits

“
Our community is ready to invest in more connection, collaboration and cross-neighborhood relationships. We're thrilled to be selected for this opportunity.

- Amanda Barker, Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships

- ”
- Convening gatherings that bring people together and help them learn the skills of weaving
 - Joining a national network of local leaders rebuilding trust in communities across the U.S.

“This partnership will help us shine a light on the natural connectors in our community and support the work they're already doing to build trust, connection and belonging,” said Amanda Barker, Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships. “Our community is ready to invest in more connection, collaboration and cross-neighborhood relationships. We're thrilled to be selected for this opportunity.”

The program directly aligns with LCF's strategic initiative, Prosper Lincoln and more specifically its Connections pillar. Grounded in the

2025 Lincoln Vital Signs report and shaped by hundreds of community conversations, Prosper Lincoln's work in Connections focuses on increasing opportunities for people to improve their economic status, supporting engagement within neighborhoods and building resident-led neighborhood initiatives.

“While loneliness, isolation and division seem to define our national story, these 25 Community Hosts show us another truth – that trust grows when neighbors show up for one another, build relationships and work together,” said Frederick J. Riley, Executive Director of Weave: The Social Fabric Project at the Aspen Institute. “Each organization is already deeply woven into the life of its community, and by going even deeper, they're proving that a culture of belonging isn't just possible – it's already taking hold, block by block.”

About Weave

Weave: The Social Fabric Project is an initiative of the Aspen Institute dedicated to strengthening trust, connection and belonging in communities across the United States. Weave supports everyday weavers – neighbors who show up for others, bridge divides and build community. Through storytelling, online learning, community-building programs and the Weaver Awards, Weave works to repair America's social fabric from the ground up and lift up the people who are already leading this work in their neighborhoods. [Learn more at Weavers.org.](https://weavers.org)



Mission Investments

Supporting the Perennial Needs of Our Community

Long-term Lincolmites might remember the potted bonsai trees and vibrant 1960s delivery vans that dotted the property outside of Azalealand Floral & Greenhouses on 37th Street and Prescott Avenue.

The nursery and flower shop was opened in the 1940s by Masami and Haruye Utsumi after they fled the West Coast during World War II to avoid detainment in an internment camp for Japanese Americans.

By 2012, the pink, teal and yellow panels on the Chevy vans had faded, and their son Hitoshi Utsumi closed the business after he and his wife were diagnosed with cancer.

For years, the property sat in disarray. More than a decade later, the owner at the time took on the large job of demolishing the greenhouse and cleaning up the land located in the southeast Lincoln neighborhood.

Charlie Wesche, CEO of NeighborWorks Lincoln (NWL), a nonprofit community housing development organization, would find himself driving past the empty site – dreaming of what might take root.

“As long as I’ve known it’s been a vacant piece of property, but a lot of people tell me it’s where they

used to get their prom corsages,” he shared.

Charlie’s dream began to take shape when NeighborWorks Lincoln purchased the former Azalealand site in September 2024. Since then, NWL has been working alongside neighbors to develop the 2.9 acres into 18 affordable homes for first-time homebuyers, two market rate homes and neighborhood amenities.

As the predevelopment work began, Charlie reached out to Lincoln Community Foundation’s Strategic Partnerships Consultant, Rich Herink, about a possible mission investment



Azalealand Floral & Greenhouses circa 1960s

loan from LCF’s endowment pool to help finance the acquisition and predevelopment phase of the project.

Mission investments provide both a financial return and support social benefits to the community. “They are often structured as loans, loan guarantees and equity investments infused directly into projects, or through intermediaries that invest in these projects,” explained Rich.

“I initially asked Rich for a \$900,000 loan for predevelopment expenses,” said Charlie. “That’s a much bigger request than we’ve made in the past.”

LCF committed to funding half of the requested loan amount, while also connecting NWL to Community Development Resources (CDR), a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that provides capital and technical assistance to develop affordable housing in Nebraska, to secure the rest of the financing.

“When all was said and done, we had financing at 4%, which is better

than we could have done getting a market loan,” said Charlie. “That was the power of LCF coming to the table to provide the initial half and making the connection to CDR.”

Beyond the Azalealand property, a low-interest loan from LCF also helped NWL finance the acquisition and predevelopment expenses for a mixed-income project at 46th and Pioneers, which is now wrapping up construction.

“Money costs money,” shared Charlie. “But with a mission investment loan from LCF, we’re saving money on the entire project, which allows us to deliver more homes at an affordable price.”

When the loans are repaid, LCF can reinvest the funds into new community projects. As Rich stated, “it’s a home run.”

“We like working with nonprofit developers, landowners and home builders, knowing that they will reposition properties to remain affordable for the long-term,” he continued. “We’re not just

concerned about affordability now but maintaining affordability in the future.”

LCF’s mission investments have not only supported the creation of affordable housing, but also have helped entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses and provided support for local nonprofits to expand their services.

“Seeing these funds redeployed to seed new ideas in our community creates a cycle of good,” said Rich. “By putting our philanthropic capital to work, we can open more opportunities for Lincoln to grow and thrive.”



CEO of NeighborWorks Lincoln, Charlie Wesche, poses next to affordable housing construction at 46th and Pioneers



Celebrating 15 Years of Give to Lincoln Day

Annual giving event has raised more than \$75 million for local nonprofits



When Lincoln comes together – BIG things happen! Coordinated by the Lincoln Community Foundation (LCF), Give to Lincoln Day is an online event encouraging donations to support the local nonprofits and causes people care about. Giving kicks off May 1 and builds towards the 15th Give to Lincoln Day on Thursday, May 28.

“Give to Lincoln Day has soared beyond all expectations,” said Tracy Edgerton, LCF President. “Year after year, Lincoln embraces the opportunity to uplift the critical work of our local nonprofits. We look forward to celebrating our community’s milestone for generosity and local giving.”

Every participating nonprofit organization will receive a proportional share of a \$650,000 match fund, based upon its percentage of total dollars raised, thanks to LCF and sponsors including Presenting Sponsor, West Gate Bank. Last year’s event raised a record \$9.5 million for 502 local nonprofits. Give to Lincoln Day has raised \$75 million since 2012.

“As a community bank, West Gate Bank’s involvement in Give to Lincoln Day goes back to the first year of this event,”

said Carl Sjulín, West Gate Bank President and CEO. “Early on, we saw it was a natural fit with our community focus. We are proud to continue our partnership with the Lincoln Community Foundation as the Presenting Sponsor of Give to Lincoln Day.”

Donors may search for participating nonprofits and give online at GiveToLincoln.com. Donations must be made before 11:59 p.m. on May 28 to count toward the giving day and the match fund. The minimum donation is \$10 per organization.

Gifts may be mailed to the Lincoln Community Foundation (215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68508) if postmarked by May 21. Donors may also drop off donations through May 28 at all Lincoln West Gate Bank branches via the lobby or the commercial drop drawers. Eligible donors can now use a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from their IRAs to support their favorite local causes during Give to Lincoln Day – more information available on Page 5.

Many thanks to our Match Fund sponsors!

West Gate Bank (Presenting Sponsor) • ABC Electric • ALLO Fiber • Assurity Life Foundation • Rich Bailey • The Hsin-Chao Family • D.A. Davidson & Co. • Davis Design • Firespring • Forvis Mazars, LLP • HBE, LLP • Hudl • Kile & Cuz Johnson • Kawasaki Motors Manufacturing Corp. • Kubly Family Foundation • Mail Management Services, Inc. • Derrel Martin • The Family of Gates & Daisy Minnick • William J. Mueller & Kim M. Robak • Nelnet • Olsson • Pepsi Cola of Lincoln • Pinnacle Bank • Runza National • Joe W. & Ruth K. Seacrest Fund • Tom & Lisa Smith • Dr. Gene & Kristen Stohs • Talent Plus Inc • The Estate of Mark H. Tallman • Bill & Mae Whitmer Family Fund • WRK Family Foundation