



# BRANFORD

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## Community Foundation

IMPACT REPORT

2022





We are so grateful for you, our  
caring Branford neighbors.

Thank you for proving—once again—that our supporters love our Branford community. You are generous, caring, and compassionate.

Your gifts to the **Branford Community Foundation** over the years have been a critical source of support across our town, from mental health services to theater productions on the Green to uniforms for participants in Special Olympics. The needs that emerged suddenly and urgently in 2020 were vast—and have lasted longer than any of us anticipated. When we first put out a call for help, your generosity was swift and breathtaking.

In 2021, despite having done so much in 2020, you did it again. You went above and beyond, and we had our second largest year in contributions—second only to 2020. We were amazed, and it allowed us to continue our work to help the community.

Thanks to your generosity, we were able to continue our efforts to assist those Branford residents who were hardest hit by the COVID19 pandemic. We were able to prioritize basic needs (including food, shelter, and emergency financial services), mental health services, and youth services.

**We are so grateful for you**, our caring Branford neighbors. We hope the stories that follow in this booklet give you a sense of just how profound your impact has been on the Branford community during the last year.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Liza Janssen Petra".

Liza Janssen Petra  
*Executive Director*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Heather Hackley".

Heather Hackley  
*Board Chair*





“Let’s see if we can make art and a community gathering space and make it work.”

Keely Baisden Knudsen and Stephanie Stiefel Williams were on the brink of opening their own theater company when the first reports of a new and contagious virus in Asia were making headlines. The duo had spent years searching for the perfect shoreline location, engaging local support, permitting the restoration plans and gutting the historic Stony Creek Puppet House. When the novel coronavirus reached the United States, it threatened to derail all their hard work.

The theater dates back to 1866, when a non-denominational church built a community gathering place in the picturesque shoreline enclave. After that building was destroyed by fire in 1900, a silent picture movie house was

built in its place and was later reimagined as a theater for the Parish Players of the local Stony Creek Church of Christ. Among the famous icons to tread the boards in Stony Creek was a young Orson Welles.

It is rumored that the theater became a parachute factory during World War II and later housed a manufacturer of women’s undergarments. But nearly 100 years after the site was first established as a community gathering spot, Jim Weil and his partner Salvatore Macri reestablished the building as a theater and, for decades, entertained the shoreline with a unique Italian tradition of life-sized marionette shows.



When Knudsen and Williams discovered Stony Creek, the spotlights had been dark for too long and they hoped to bring life back into the historic place now known as The Legacy Theatre. Despite the pandemic, the stars aligned in several unexpected ways, not the least of which was ongoing support from the Branford Community Foundation (BCF).

Knudsen notes that in the early days of the pandemic, construction was considered an “essential service,” allowing renovations to continue. Another happy coincidence: they were already considering a state-of-the-art air filtration system when its importance became even more apparent.

“In the midst of this tidal wave of tragedy, we were able to take advantage of knowledge we were gaining through the construction process to be able to keep our audience as safe as possible,” Knudsen explains.

Unfortunately, any programs for 2020 and early 2021 had to be cancelled as theaters everywhere were shuttered. Instead, The Legacy Theatre used virtual events and podcasts to build support and enthusiasm while they continued to plan a full season of musicals and plays optimistic that they would be allowed in 2021. Meanwhile, the guidelines and regulations were changing constantly.



“We thought, ‘Let’s just plan this opening! Let’s see if we can make art and a community gathering space and make it work,” Knudsen says.

Behind the scenes, however, things were complicated. Meeting the state guidelines to open required strict cleaning standards between every performance while also restricting ticket sales to allow for social distancing between theater goers. The Legacy Theatre turned to the Branford Community Foundation for help with the added unexpected expense of cleaning and sanitizing the theater.

“I have to say thank you for giving money where there is absolutely no glamour,” Knudsen says with a laugh. “It was a huge expense and continues to be, so that grant was very, very helpful for us just to get started.”

A \$5,000 grant from BCF allowed them to hire a cleaning company to come after each performance and disinfect every surface — not just dressing rooms and restrooms, but every doorknob, handrail, elbow rest and any place a patron or player may have touched. The grant also helped purchase contactless thermometers and hand sanitizing stations.

This grant was the latest grant from BCF, which has supported the project from its onset. Previously, the foundation had contributed funds to support the replacement of the roof, a summer performance of A Midsummer Night’ Dream on the Branford Green before the theater was open, and a grant for operational costs during the difficult 2020 season.

“We are so grateful. When you have a vision and it’s something that’s not yet tangible... to have something like the [Branford] Community Foundation support you, and your ideas, and your hopes and dreams,” Knudsen says, “it gives me goosebumps. It is a huge leap of faith. That consistent support has meant so much.”

*“We are so grateful. [The] consistent support has meant so much.”  
- Keely Baisden Knudsen*







# HELPING FAMILIES SETTLE

*“Strong communities are born out of individuals being their best selves.”*

The quote comes from indigenous activist and author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson but it is a truth that Laura Noe has seen play out many times in her life, most recently when a group of individuals known as Helping Families Settle - Branford Refugee Resettlement (HFS - BRR) came together to welcome a family from Afghanistan. The group was aided by a \$7,500 Emergent Grant from the Branford Community Foundation.

Laila and Mosa arrived in Branford in April after leaving Afghanistan in the final days of the American occupation of their homeland, as the Taliban swiftly returned to power. Their journey began in August 2021 when they were evacuated to an American military base in Qatar where they spent months being vetted and approved for resettlement. Laila and Mosa came into the United States in March to another military base in Virginia for a few weeks, were flown to New York,

then shuttled to New Haven and finally were able to lay their heads in Branford.

Meanwhile, more than 50 people had come together to form HFS - BRR. Noe does not want any credit and does not want to be recognized more than any individual in the group who have each taken some responsibility to welcome Laila and Mosa, and the baby they are expecting in August. But she is the spokesperson and point-person working with Integrated Refugee & Immigration Services (IRIS).

“There is no I in this, only we,” Noe says. Indeed, more than 17 subcommittees took a share in the effort by researching and executing plans for fundraising, housing, education, logistics, translators, medical care and more. When a refugee family arrives, Noe explains, they have been through so much and come with so little to a place



where everything is different. The culture, climate, food, language, economic and education systems are all strange and new. To begin, volunteers take a training class from IRIS, learning how to be not only welcoming and helpful, but ultimately to provide scaffolding to help refugees become self-sufficient.

HFS - BRR includes realtors to address the challenge of finding a home. An education committee prepared to help Laila and Mosa join English language classes, but also took it upon themselves to educate their fellow volunteers about the culture and customs of Afghanistan. Others are helping to navigate

American bureaucracies like social security, the Department of Motor Vehicles and the healthcare system. Still others arranged and prepared groceries and meals to be ready when they arrived.

"The world can be kinda tough. But this story is full of grace and generosity and the best that people have to offer," Noe says. For many volunteers, the resettling of political refugees is way outside of their comfort zones, Noe explains. But everyone on the committee brought their skills and expertise; they were willing to learn and to share. HFS-BRR is, in fact, unique to IRIS in that it isn't affiliated with a particular church group as



*Photo courtesy of Bill O'Brien*

so many resettlement committees are, and were further aided by fiscal partner, The Branford Microfund.

"It is something to witness what happens when people come together," she says. "We had everything under the sun on the committee, and across the political and religious spectrum. But there was no feeling of divisiveness. It was more a feeling of 'ok, we'll figure it out together.'"

Volunteers have been taking the new Branford residents shopping for groceries, a haircut, and some items to start a garden. They've had a tour of the Blackstone Library, joined intensive English language classes, and Mosa, a woodworker, has started a job with a local contractor, MN Reale, Inc. Laila

and Mosa are both artists and a committee is working with the Branford Arts & Cultural Alliance to allow them to show their work. A baby shower is being planned after the baby arrives, in keeping with the customs of Afghanistan.

Noe is quick to point out her gratitude to the Branford Community Foundation, as well as the Branford Microfund, Branford High Music Makers and so many individuals and groups who contributed funds and donated household items.

Noe believes this experience has been the manifestation of that quote about communities made of individuals being their best selves. "Imagine," she muses, "if we all acted like this every day."



## All Joe Higgins ever wanted to do was help people.

For more than 40 years as a civil employee of the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), that's what he did.

When Joe retired to Branford, it was less than a month before he said to his wife, Angie, "let's get involved in the community," and less than a year before he was elected Selectman on the ticket with First Selectman Jamie Cosgrove.

So when Joe passed away in June 2020, it made perfect sense to Angie to set up the Joseph E. Higgins Jr. 9/11 Memorial Scholarship through the Branford Community Foundation (BCF). The fund provides scholarships to a graduating high school senior pursuing a career in emergency services or to someone already working in the field who is furthering their education. The scholarship can be used for coursework, fees and supplies. Angie and Branford First

Selectman Jamie Cosgrove raised \$20,000, twice the minimum required to start a fund with the BCF, in just a few months.

Joe had been an easy friend to make. Angie says he was always the life of the party, loved a microphone, and loved meeting and connecting with people. He was the best man in a wedding at age 19, when someone set him up with Angie. He liked to tell people, "I went on a blind date and never saw straight again." But he also knew his career choice would impact Angie. On a walk in the park early in their courtship, Angie says, "He said, 'I want to talk about something serious, because I'm really falling for you.'" He told her that he had taken the fire department exam and that it would

mean that he would need to be available on nights and weekends and holidays. "Joe was very mature and he said if I am a 9-to-5 kind of lady, he wanted me to tell him right away. He had this calling. I said 'whatever makes you happy.'"

He began his career with the FDNY as a dispatcher not long after that. He rose through the ranks to become deputy director of dispatch operations and eventually found his place as a Fire Commissioner's Liaison, the connection between the rank-and-file firefighters and the policy makers on the commission.

As he anticipated, Joe was often called away from home for emergencies. He was there on a foggy morning in 1990 when an Avianca flight from Colombia failed to make its landing at JFK airport and crashed into a hillside on Long Island, killing 73 of the 159 people aboard. He was there in the fall of 2003 when a ferry from Staten Island crashed into a pier, killing 11 people and injuring dozens more. And he was there on the sunny morning of September 11, 2001 when terrorists targeted the World Trade Center. Angie recalls that he went down with eight firefighters from Brooklyn and he was the only one who came home.



*Photo courtesy of Bill O'Brien*





When he was allowed back to the site three days later, he and others collected what they could find - badges, helmets, cell phones - and he spent months returning the items to family members in person. "That haunted him until the day he died," Angie says. "But he brought everything he could find back to the families, to bring them some comfort."

It all comes back to that calling to help people. Joe recognized it in young kids who would hang around the fire department on Friday and Saturday nights in New York. He'd encourage them and try to keep them on the straight and narrow. When Joe's own health deteriorated, and Angie had to call for help, she witnessed it personally among Branford's first responders: "I give all the credit to the police and fire departments. They treated him with so much dignity. The kindness, compassion and professionalism that they showed was just very touching. When you have a calling like that," Angie says, "that's what the scholarship is for."

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*Photo courtesy of Bill O'Brien*



# 2021 BY THE NUMBERS



CAMP HAZEN

19 campers

from Branford received  
financial assistance



SPECIAL OLYMPICS  
CONNECTICUT

34 athletes

participated in the 2021 Unified  
Sports Fall Festival through  
subsidized registration fees



CLIFFORD W. BEERS  
GUIDANCE CLINIC

38 Banford

children & adolescents  
benefitted from Outpatient  
Mental Health Services

FEED BRANFORD KIDS

200 kids

received weekend  
food bundles



ORCHARD HOUSE  
ADULT DAY CENTER

5 tablets

purchased allowing  
34 seniors travel the  
world virtually



NEIGHBORHOOD  
MUSIC SCHOOL

50 Branford residents  
participated in programming,  
20 seniors participated in  
Dance for Parkinson Disease,  
4 Branford scholarships

WOMEN & FAMILY  
LIFE CENTER

84 residents

of Branford were  
served by the Guided  
Assistance Program



COMMUNITY  
DINING ROOM

4 new computers, 6 new  
monitors, 3 new keyboards  
& mouse, and 3 webcams  
to completely upgrade  
office technology



THE CONNECTICUT  
HOSPICE, INC.

2,500

COVID19 vaccinations  
administered



NEW REACH, INC.

Provided housing and  
Integrated care for a  
homeless Branford resident

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS  
of GREATER NEW HAVEN

54 students

participated in English  
Conversation Groups

LEGACY THEATRE

8,500 patrons

were able to enjoy the  
theatre safely during the  
COVID19 pandemic

SHORELINE CHAMBER  
OF COMMERCE

746 members

benefited from webinars  
related to COVID programs  
& 21 memberships to  
local non-profits



READ TO GROW, INC.

1,000 books

distributed to children  
living in Branford

CAMP TOTOKETT

30 campers

paired 1:1 with a  
high school counselor





## GRANT AWARDS

**The Branford Community Foundation** (BCF) committed \$162,458 for initiatives and organizations serving Branford in 2021. This reflects 18 grants made through the competitive grant process, 2 emergent grants, 35 Scholarship awards and 1 donor-advised grant, as well as investments in BCF-driven leadership initiatives.

**\$700 Branford Compassion Club** to cover the costs of neutering 5 cats in Branford.

**\$1,000 Special Olympics Connecticut** for purchasing new sports equipment, subsidizing athlete registration fees and paying for bus transportation to competition events.

**\$1,500 Shoreline Arts Alliance** for a new program initiative, “Expressions in Art,” a creative arts community support group.

**\$1,750 Leadership Initiatives** to support the professional development of leaders of local charitable organizations.

**\$2,000 Camp Hazen YMCA** for financial assistance to campers from Branford.

**\$2,500 Neighborhood Music School** for scholarships and financial aid for Branford residents participating in NMS programs.

**\$2,500 The Connecticut Hospice, Inc.** to support COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

**\$2,500 Read to Grow, Inc.** to provide free books to Branford children receiving food from the Branford Community Dining Room, as well as to other organizations, including East Shore Health District and the Branford Counseling Center.

**\$3,000 The Nat and Jack Farrell House, Inc** to support transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness in Branford.

**\$3,900 Orchard House Medical Adult Day Center** for cultural activities for participants.

**\$4,100 Donor Advised Grant** to support the Branford Land Trust’s purchase of the Jarvis Creek property.

**\$5,000 Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven** to train and support volunteer tutors to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy in partnership with Shoreline Adult Education.

**\$5,000 New Reach, Inc.** for general operating support to continue providing ongoing activities and stability to individuals, families and youth who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

**\$5,000 Clifford W. Beers Guidance Clinic, Inc.** to support the Outpatient Mental Health Program’s Shoreline Office’s delivery of trauma-informed, non-reimbursable case management and care coordination services for Branford children and families.

**\$5,000 Legacy Theatre** for COVID19 Control and Prevention Safety Protocols.

**\$5,500 Shoreline Chamber of Commerce** for general operating expenses due to the loss of income during COVID19.

**\$5,875 Sponsorships** of local events and organizations.

**\$7,500 Helping Families Settle - Branford Refugee Resettlement** to support responsive community emergent effort to relocate a refugee family to Branford.

**\$8,000 Camp Totokett** to support the re-opening of camp after being shut down due to COVID19.

**\$10,000 Feed Branford Kids** to provide extra nutritional support to school age kids in Branford.

**\$10,000 New Antioch Church of God** for transitional housing for women who are suffering from addiction.

**\$10,633 Community Dining Room** for technology improvements.

**\$20,000 Women & Family Life Center** to expand their Guided Assistance Program to support the immediate and long-term needs of Branford residents.

**\$39,500 Branford High School Scholarships** to 35 Branford High School graduates pursuing higher education.

*Competitive grants are awarded to qualified nonprofit and government agencies serving the town of Branford. For more information and the application form, visit our website: [branfordcommunityfoundation.org](https://branfordcommunityfoundation.org).*

*Top photo courtesy of Bill O'Brien*





2021 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Despite the challenging environment of the past two years, the Branford community and the Branford Community Foundation (BCF) continued to provide the critical support needed to address the urgent needs resulting from the ongoing pandemic. Thanks to your support, BCF was able to positively impact the quality of life in our special town during an unimaginably challenging time.

BCF takes the stewardship of the assets entrusted to it very seriously and is pleased to report that assets stayed steady with a modest increase from the previous year, despite distributing the second highest total grants amount into the community. The largest grant making year was 2020, thanks to your support of our COVID19 Fund for Branford.

While 2021 contributions of \$300,609 were behind last year’s incredible response to our COVID19 Fund for Branford, the overwhelming support from the community represented the second largest contribution amount in BCF history, demonstrating the confidence donors have in BCF’s ability to make a difference.

*Our Finance Committee works with the investment professionals at the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven (“CFGNH”) to preserve and grow our endowment. BCF’s individual funds are pooled and invested in a diversified portfolio managed by CFGNH.*

*Key financial Indicators are extracted from annual financial statements and exclude inter-fund gifts and grants. A copy of our Form 990 is available upon request.*

AS OF DECEMBER 31	2021	2020	% CHANGE
Total Assets	\$2,999,377	\$2,993,510	.2%
Total Contributions	\$300,609	\$448,948*	-33% (+23.8% without COVID19 Fund contributions)
Total Grants	\$162,333	\$374,324**	-56.7% (-5.7% without COVID19 Fund distributions)

*\*Contributions to the COVID19 Fund represent \$206,176 of this total*

*\*\* COVID19 Fund grants represent \$202,235 of this total*



*Photo courtesy of Bill O'Brien*



We are so grateful for the incredible donor support the local community provides the Branford Community Foundation.

None of this would be possible without you.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the following individuals, businesses and foundations who made financial contributions to BCF from January 1 to December 31, 2021.

\$10,000 AND UP

Anonymous Donor  
Anonymous Donor  
Carole Brown  
Guilford Savings Bank  
Anne & Creighton Hooker  
Jeanette & Robert Mobeck  
Nancy & Thomas Patton  
Nell & Art Slusark  
Jan Walzer & David Etzel  
Celia & Robert Wheeler

\$5,000 TO \$10,000

Rita Berkson & Randy Reinhold  
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Polly A. & Alan S. Fitz  
Linda Karoff & Peggy Boyer  
The Meredith Corporation  
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Karen & Ryan Torello  
Rita Trayner  
Frank Vigliotti, SP Development,  
LLC

\$2,000 TO \$4,999

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Joe Schiffer  
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Myra & Joe Zelson  
Darlene & Jeremy  
Zimmermann  
Linda & Howard Zonana  
  
**UP TO \$100**  
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Gayle Aspinall  
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Laura Baker  
Theresa & Peter Baldino  
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Richard Slater  
Doris Slater  
Erica Cheney Smart &  
Christopher Cheney  
Susan Solomon  
Louise Stanton  
Alinor Sterling & Steve Mentz  
Lesla Tischler  
Malaine Trecoske & Tom Jarvie  
Marilyn & David Vailette  
Jean & Anthony Ventura  
Marnie & Alex Weiner  
Karen & Richard Weis  
Marcia & George Wheeler  
Debbie & Leo Whelan  
Barbara Yamada  
Dottie & Rick Young  
J.E.F Zetterberg

*We worked carefully to ensure the completeness and accuracy of this list. We apologize for any mistakes, and ask that you contact Liza Janssen Petra at (203) 444-4898 or, lpetra@branfordcommunityfoundation.org to correct any inconsistencies.*



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In 2021, despite having done so much in 2020, you did it again. You went above and beyond, and we had our second largest year in contributions—second only to 2020. We were amazed, and it allowed us to continue our work to help the community.

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#### DIRECTORS

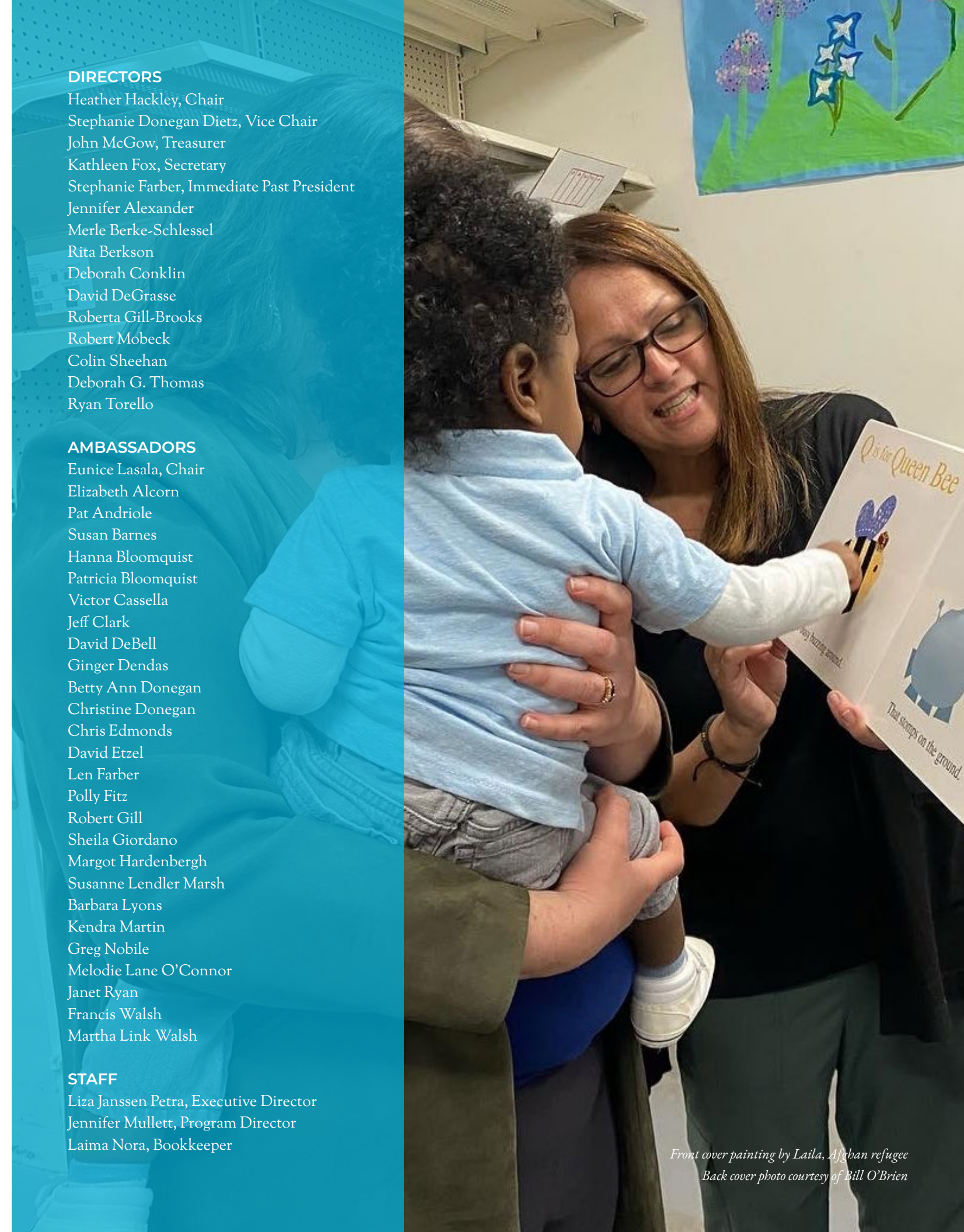
Heather Hackley, Chair  
Stephanie Donegan Dietz, Vice Chair  
John McGow, Treasurer  
Kathleen Fox, Secretary  
Stephanie Farber, Immediate Past President  
Jennifer Alexander  
Merle Berke-Schlessel  
Rita Berkson  
Deborah Conklin  
David DeGrasse  
Roberta Gill-Brooks  
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Colin Sheehan  
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Ryan Torello

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Betty Ann Donegan  
Christine Donegan  
Chris Edmonds  
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Susanne Lendler Marsh  
Barbara Lyons  
Kendra Martin  
Greg Nobile  
Melodie Lane O'Connor  
Janet Ryan  
Francis Walsh  
Martha Link Walsh

#### STAFF

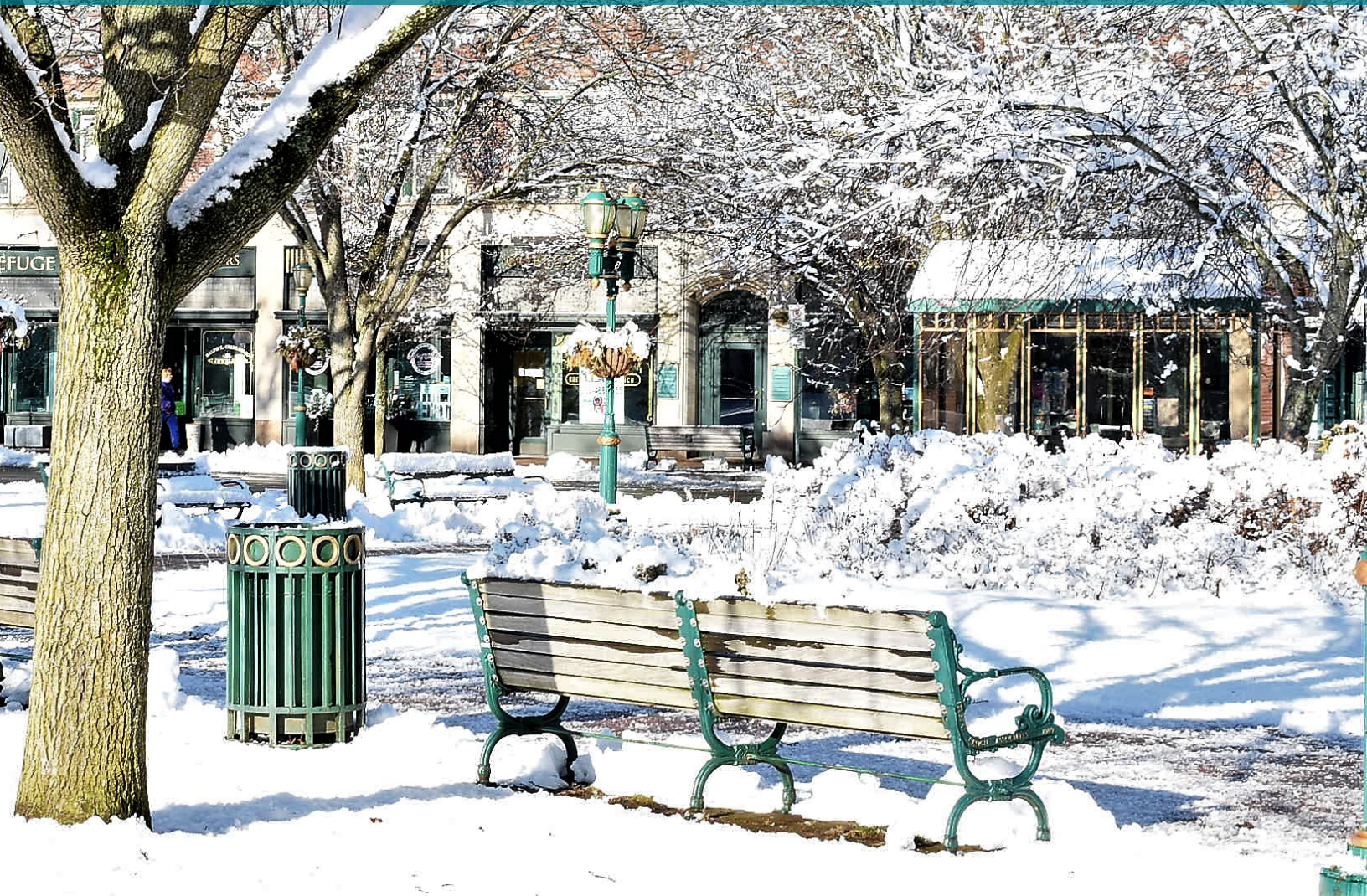
Liza Janssen Petra, Executive Director  
Jennifer Mullett, Program Director  
Laima Nora, Bookkeeper



*Front cover painting by Laila, Afghan refugee  
Back cover photo courtesy of Bill O'Brien*



# THANK YOU



**BRANFORD**  
Community Foundation

PO BOX 462 | BRANFORD, CT 06405 | (203) 444-4898 | [BRANFORDCOMMUNITYFOUNDATION.ORG](http://BRANFORDCOMMUNITYFOUNDATION.ORG)