Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, the Orange County Community Foundation has awarded more than half a billion dollars to individuals, families and organizations, both locally and around the world since it was founded in 1989.

“We’re dedicated to unleashing the power of philanthropy in Orange County," says Shelley Hoss, president of the Newport Beach-based nonprofit, who describes the foundation as “an experienced partner for facilitating impactful giving” to grow the good in Orange County and beyond by partnering with donors, nonprofits and community leaders to find solutions to pressing needs.

OCCF was founded by Judy Swayne, who left a lasting legacy for all who call Orange County home. “With a passion for local causes, she recruited a group of community leaders to make her vision for a thriving community foundation a reality,” Hoss says. Swayne served as executive director until she retired in 2000 and passed the mantle to Hoss.

Today, OCCF is home to more than 580 charitable funds benefiting a wide range of causes, including human services, education, health and wellness, arts, the environment, community development and scholarships. Since the foundation was established, it has awarded nearly $600 million in scholarships and grants, while its grant-making activity places the foundation in the top 2 percent among more than 780 community foundations across the country.
Gardening at The Ecology Center in San Juan Capistrano, which the Orange County Community Foundation has helped to support.
HOW TO HELP

Upcoming online fundraisers allow locals to give back.

Launched in 2017, iheartOC Collaborative Giving Days provide a variety of OC nonprofits an expanded opportunity to partner in hosting fundraising around a shared cause. Orange County Community Foundation provides marketing resources and training for these events. For 2018 and 2019 through May, these events raised a total of $2.5 million for local organizations.

“I am … proud of the success of our Collaborative Giving Days,” says OCCF president Shelley Hoss. “It’s truly a testament to the generosity of our community.”

Interested in helping? Check out one of these upcoming Collaborative Giving Days:

July 17—Preserving Dignity, a Giving Day for OC’s older adults in need
Aug. 21—Greatness Amplified, a Giving Day for Boys & Girls Clubs in Orange County

For more information, visit oc-cf.org.

Hoss says the foundation will mark its 30th birthday this fall by “celebrating the evolution of our impact, as well as announcing brand-new, forward-looking initiatives.”

Passion and Purpose
Hoss describes OCCF as an organization that operates at the intersection of passion and purpose as it carries out its mission of identifying community needs and fulfilling philanthropic visions. “We’re in a unique position to forge meaningful connections between donors and local nonprofits, while driving innovative problem-solving to tackle some of our county’s greatest challenges,” she says.

As an example, OCCF launched the Orange County Veterans Initiative in partnership with several donors in 2011. The program was expanded in 2015 based on findings from “The State of the American Veteran: The Orange County Veterans Study,” conducted by the University of Southern California, which confirmed that many service members returning home to Orange County don’t know where to find needed services, have difficulty transitioning to civilian employment and suffer from unmet health and mental health needs.

Since its inception, the Veterans Initiative has granted more than $3 million to area nonprofits, bringing critical support and services to over 17,000 local veterans and their families.

But it’s not just the needy who benefit from the foundation. OCCF also helps those at the other end of the economic and social spectrum by rendering advice and personalized services to philanthropists.

For instance, Dick and Mary Allen turned to OCCF when they realized their approach to philanthropy was far too scattered. “We were giving to numerous and diverse charities, but we lacked a focus or a strategy that would allow us to make a difference,” Dick Allen says.

After attending a seminar at Stanford Graduate School of Business on high-impact philanthropy, the Allens returned home to Orange County fully energized. Their original idea was a donor-advised fund for improving reading skills for young kids in underserved communities, similar to a program organized by the Peninsula Community Foundation they had learned about at the Stanford seminar.

But, as Dick Allen explains, fate intervened when their granddaughter was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 2001. “That caused us to turn our attention to organizations that are focused on finding a cure for this disease and to the creation of a facility that would provide comprehensive care to everyone with diabetes—most particularly, the underserved who often lacked access to care,” he says.

Through OCCF, the Allens’ donor-advised fund supports JDRF (formerly called the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation), the Mary and Dick Allen Diabetes Center at Hoag Health Center in Newport Beach, a variety of summer camps for those with diabetes, Yale University’s pediatric diabetes research and several other worthy causes.

“From the beginning, OCCF was a partner in helping us think about a more impactful philanthropy,” Dick Allen says. “The partnership is an ongoing one, and it’s to our mutual benefit—OCCF helps us find opportunities to leverage our philanthropy and we direct some of our giving to OCCF to help them to leverage
The intersection of strong donors and strong nonprofit organizations is the best way to tackle the county’s most pressing issues, Hoss notes. “Our goal is to connect philanthropists with the causes they care about most, and the best resources and organizations to accomplish their charitable goals,” she says.

**Connecting Philanthropists**

One of the local organizations the foundation works with is the Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach, which educates through hands-on nature experiences. The ENC is recognized as a leader in education for both science and social science, fostering community understanding and appreciation of Orange County’s natural world.

Its LEED Platinum-certified facility covers 5 acres and showcases 15 native California ecosystems accessible through walking trails. It also maintains a nature museum with hands-on exhibits and a seasonal butterfly habitat. More than 28,000 students and others visit annually.

“OCCF does a fantastic job in connecting philanthropists with worthwhile organizations throughout the county,” says Bo Glover, the center’s executive director.

“Their knowledge of the nonprofit world serves all organizations well. They’re the connection between those who want to give and those organizations doing the best work for the Orange County community. I’ve personally found the Community Foundation to be professional, thorough in … [its] research and, most importantly, mission driven.”

ENC’s first interaction with OCCF came in 2004, when it received a $20,000 donation from Frank and Judy Colver. This marked the beginning of an OCCF environmental fund that supports a range of environmental organizations throughout Orange County and from which ENC has benefited many times since.

Glover says that one of the most notable of these donor-advised funds came from Richard and Elizabeth Steele, a contribution that’s been “instrumental” in helping ENC with vitally important day-to-day operations, construction of the Butterfly House and assisting with various capital campaigns like the new ENC Nature Preschool, which is expected to open in September. “A first in our community,” Glover notes.

ENC Nature Preschool will enroll up to 72 children with a developmental, play-based curriculum and a mission to provide a deep understanding of nature and the natural world while serving as a model research forum on early childhood and environmental education.

Over her years at the helm of OCCF, Hoss has witnessed the truth in the old adage “it’s better to give than receive” many times over. “The most rewarding part of my role at OCCF is seeing people experience the joy of giving to a cause or organization that deeply touches their heart. The thrill of making a lasting impact on an issue that holds great personal meaning is an unparalleled experience—it often moves both giver and recipient to tears.”

There’s no doubt her job is highly satisfying. “Being a part of a donor’s philanthropy journey, seeing them discover their true passions, involve their children and grandchildren, and make the world—or their local community—a better place in the process. It just doesn’t get any better than that.”

NEWPORT BEACH MAGAZINE 61