

# IMPACT

 Centre  
FOUNDATION



**A Celebration  
of Voices**



# A CELEBRATION OF VOICES

Throughout Centre County, positive change is transforming lives. Change you can hear in the voices of those who call our region home. All you need do is listen.

This year, we celebrate the many voices of Centre County. Voices that come to life through the generosity of those committed to improving our region. Voices that join in harmony to create a brighter future.

These voices, in concert with Centre Foundation, have a resounding and lasting impact across our community.

In the pages that follow, the stories of five Centre County nonprofits will unfold. Local organizations such as these provide connectivity, creativity, stability, and more to our region. As you read about their tremendous spirit and dedication, consider all the passionate volunteers, donors, and dreamers who make their work possible.

In collaboration with Centre Foundation, these individuals are leading the way forward to enhance our community.

Since our inception, Centre Foundation has served as a trusted partner, connecting generous donors to the causes and organizations that matter most. Today, this legacy continues through innovative giving options that help donors make a lasting difference and grant programs that provide effective opportunities for local nonprofits.

Together we are bettering our region, facilitating a culture of giving and engagement, and creating positive change that will resonate in the voices of our vibrant community for generations. This is our story. 🌱





# A Community Effort That's Making a Splash







There's nothing like a cool swimming pool on a hot day. As summers get warmer, the availability of community swimming pools becomes increasingly more relevant to residents of all ages. But the true impact of a community pool is much deeper. From socialization to water safety, and countless benefits in between, the Mountain Top Swimming Pool has been enriching lives since 1969. And it's more relevant now, than ever.

Set on 26 beautiful acres donated by Marie and Clair Hall, the Olympic-sized Mountain Top Swimming Pool shares space with a ballfield, campground, and carnival grounds, and its purpose as a community resource has always been at the heart of its existence. While the pool welcomes guests from anywhere, its connection to the Mountain Top community is powerful.

"Our community knows how to pull together in hard times. That's why the pool is still open after 55 years," said Jennifer Nastase, president of the Mountain Top Area Pool Association. "Local

organizations like Centre Foundation have given generous support. Volunteers have given countless hours to maintenance over many years."

Jennifer stressed that having the pool available and accessible to local youth is increasingly critical. "Mountain Top Swimming Pool is one of the last places for young people in our area to go, so we strive to make it a great place," she said. "We have lots of lounge chairs and picnic tables and a beautiful pavilion donated by Fred Thompson. On cooler days we have even incorporated crafts and other activities for kids."

Attracting teenagers is equally as important and a big reason the pool association made sure to replace its diving boards. "The diving boards are in constant use for belly flops, cannonballs and a few sleek, smooth dives," Jennifer joked. A field-of-interest grant from Centre Foundation's J. Alvin and Vera E. Knepper Hawbaker Memorial Fund helped to make the project possible.

"One of my best pool memories from last

summer is of watching four boys around 12 years old, trying to jump into the pool at the exact same time, over and over," she continued. "I think they were in and out of the pool about 15 times. No electronics, just pure summer fun."

For the past two summers, with Bellefonte's Kepler Pool closed for repairs, Mountain Top Swimming Pool welcomed many Bellefonte residents, along with children from the Bellefonte YMCA Summer Camp program.

"Our pool has a capacity of 295 bathers with a huge yard for activities and plenty of seating," Jennifer said. "We have definitely been able to fill the gap for Bellefonte families, and even for State College residents who came to swim laps this past summer when the State College YMCA pool was closed for renovations."

The pool has done more than stood the test of time; it's become a family tradition. It's

commonplace to see grandparents who enjoyed the pool as children bring their grandchildren.

Close to 700 people visited the Mountain Top Swimming Pool this past summer, cooling off, staying active, and enjoying time with neighbors, friends, and family. With continued community support, like the effort by the Milesburg Lions Club, which opened a fund with Centre Foundation in 2022 to support the pool, many more guests will enjoy these benefits in future summers.

"A great summer night is being at the pool, someone grilling hot dogs, kids eating ice cream, music playing, and people of all ages being together and having fun," Jennifer said. "That sums up what the pool means to our community. That's why we do everything we do to make sure it thrives." 🌿







## Making Music Across Penns Valley

Two community organizations in Penns Valley are bringing the joys of music to the young as well as the young at heart. Social isolation and loneliness have become widespread problems, especially among older adults who face factors like living alone, loss of family members, chronic illness, and other issues. Seniors living in rural areas can be at greater risk if they lack access to public transportation. In addition to causing sadness and even depression, loneliness puts seniors at risk for cognitive decline and other serious health issues.

The Centre County Office on Aging is working to combat these issues for local seniors through a unique program at its centers in the Penns Valley Area, which seniors can access by a van that will pick them up and drop them off at their door.

Paula Snyder is the senior center manager. “Every generation has different interests. In previous years, older adults came to socialize over cards and coffee. Today they want to learn new things,” she said. “Our seniors learned to play the ukulele.”

Funding from Centre Foundation’s Ruth E. Rishel Charitable Fund, which supports nonprofits and projects exclusively in Penns Valley, enabled a partnership with Simple Gifts, a local music group comprised of two women, Linda Littleton and Karen Hirshon. Linda and Karen have conducted two 3-month sessions of weekly group lessons, bringing enough ukuleles for each participant to play.

According to Paula, the group enjoyed the sessions so much, many of them ended up buying their own.

“We enjoyed this new way of spending time together and the process of learning something as a group,” she said. “When we were able to put our new skills together into a song—with the group playing together and some members singing in rounds—we were almost giddy!”

“I think we surprised ourselves at what we accomplished in being able to pick up something new and create something beautiful,” she continued. The activity was a success on many levels—it helped to promote socialization and active minds, and it was just plain fun.

“Music is a wonderful way for older adults to engage,” Paula said. “It engages the mind and evokes memories and emotion.”

Music is alive at another popular community resource in Penns Valley. Centre Hall Library

Branch Manager, Kathleen Edwards was inspired by an article about Music Gardens in community spaces in *American Libraries Magazine*. When she saw a Centre Foundation Field-of-Interest grant about music, she applied for funding to bring her vision to life.

With support from the Patricia Farrell Music Fund, the library installed its own Music Garden with three musical instruments in spring 2023. The garden includes a flower, a butterfly and a toadstool, each with its own mallet attached to make a variety of sounds. Although the garden is still new, it’s already being enjoyed by kindergarten students at Centre Hall Elementary School.



“Every week during the school year, the kindergarten classes walk over to the library for storytime and to select books,” she said. “We invite the classes to take turns playing the instruments when they visit.”

The garden continues to evolve, and Kathleen is planning a dedication and new programming for spring of 2024.

“The impact so far has been extremely positive so I hope to engage more people through things like music-themed storytimes and gardening activities for adult patrons, which will enhance the area with more plants and flowers and add to the library’s curb appeal,” she said. 🌱







One Space, Many Voices



A thank you note from a frequent visitor to 3 Dots recently made Executive Director Erica Quinn stop and take stock in the life-changing impact of the community space in Downtown State College. It said, ‘I became myself by watching other people be themselves.’

“The entire note was so heartfelt, but this particular line really resonated with me,” Erica said.

3 Dots serves as an art and humanities community space, promoting local arts, hosting performances and community events, and offering an inclusive public space for civic engagement.

Through its original programming and collaborations with community groups, 3 Dots has emerged as a local leader in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB). It is the home-base for Opulence, Penn State’s Drag Ambassador club, and partners with local BIPOC leaders and Centre LGBT+.

“3 Dots is a space for authenticity where everyone can have a transformative experience. We get a lot of feedback about what the space means to different people, and it’s a broad impact,” Erica said.

Because of its wide appeal, 3 Dots is also a safe place for dialogue and relationship building. “One of my favorite things is watching people having conversations they might have never engaged in elsewhere. These conversations turn into relationships. People become friends,” she continued.

Events like open mic nights bring together intergenerational audiences for unexpected collaborations between hip-hop artists and folk musicians, professionals and first-time performers. An international music series exposes a local audience to music from around the world.

“From some people, we hear that this is one of the least diverse places they’ve lived, and from others that, for them, it is the most diverse. These two points of view seem incongruous, yet both are true. It’s at the crossroads of these perspectives that 3 Dots exists, engaging opposite points of view in conversation,” Erica said.

To expand its reach, 3 Dots frequently goes beyond its walls. Street events and patio-based programs make it easy to engage. Likewise, 3 Dots’ monthly \$1,000 grant program offers a low barrier to entry for anyone with a creative idea to make a difference.

“These grants provide no-strings-attached



“3 Dots is a space for authenticity.”

funding through a simple application process, and they are open to projects county-wide,” Erica said. Past grants have funded a Black History Month concert, a pollinator garden, a local theatre company, an Ethiopian cooking class, a cross-cultural music festival, and more. So far, \$63,000 in grants have been awarded—all made possible through donors and the 3 Dots board, a partnership that Erica calls the organization’s “philanthropic core.”

Generosity is, in fact, the foundation of 3 Dots. Centre Foundation funding from the Knight Foundation Fund and the Kalin Family Fund got the nonprofit off the ground in 2019

and has provided a runway for growth. Centre Gives is a cornerstone of its annual fundraising, and Field-of-Interest and Donor-Advised grants have funded additional programming and improvements to the patio.

“Beyond funding, Centre Foundation is an important mentor and advocate,” Erica said, helping to fuel exceptional growth. “This year, 3 Dots is on track to welcome between 40,000-45,000 visitors, our biggest year yet and an increase of 22% from last year.”

This success has spurred plans for expansion. In addition to continuing to support local artists and musicians, 3 Dots is planning an

artist-in-residence program that will extend its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Erica described it this way: “We are looking at this program through a strong DEIB lens and hoping to secure artists with whom individuals and groups who feel othered or minoritized can connect. The goal is to help create a space for affinity where they can see themselves reflected through the work of these visiting residents. We want to engage people in the process of making art, not only in viewing the finished product, and we are focused on the equity of both art and identity.” 🌱





## 50 Years of Health for Mind, Body & Spirit

Making healthy decisions at the grocery store and in the kitchen can be challenging, especially for busy individuals and families. Teaching healthy eating habits at a young age can yield lifelong benefits, but it's never too late to start learning about nutrition and making healthier choices.



Two programs at the Moshannon Valley YMCA, supported by Centre Foundation, are giving participants from ages 8-80 more experience in the kitchen.

The Kids Cooking Class is offered weekly for month-long sessions and teaches basics like kitchen tools and safety, basic nutrition, and how to make easy, healthy, and yummy meals that kids can make on their own.

"The goal is to expose kids to the kitchen environment and show them they are capable of making a few simple meals," said Executive Director Sydney White who will lead the class.

Parents join their kids for the class, which Sydney hopes will inspire families to cook together and think outside of the box for recipes. "We'll be making homemade pizzas, taco quesadillas, and French toast roll-ups. I hope it will demonstrate how you can change up ingredients or the way you use them to add some variety to your meals."

While the class will address good nutrition and healthy habits, Sydney said she is focused mostly on fun. "I love cooking and working with kids, so it will be just as much fun for me," she said.

Sydney also has a passion for health and wellness, which she's bringing to Meal Prep Monday, another class she hosts once a month for adults at the YMCA.

"This class aims to show that healthy meals can be delicious," she said. "I love using interesting and unexpected ingredients to create meals that are healthy and taste great." Her latest secret ingredient is cottage cheese, which can add protein and, when blended, a smooth creaminess to sauces for her buffalo chicken wraps and alfredo pasta dish.

"I keep the focus in the class on the health benefits and versatility of foods that have traditionally been considered 'diet foods.' When people taste these foods used in a different way, it motivates them to try more new ingredients they might have passed over before," she said.

Programs like these make the Moshannon Valley YMCA an important community resource. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the Y strives to help children, adults, and families maintain a healthy spirit, mind, and body through a wide variety of opportunities.

Most notably, parents in the community rely on the Y's early learning program, before- and after-school care, and summer camp to provide a safe, enriching, and fun environment for their children. From toddlers to school age, kids of all ages have a place to learn, grow, and thrive, thanks to the generosity of Centre Gives and all who donate to their organization. 🌱





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# WHERE THE HEART IS

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When a family achieves home ownership, they gain more than a physical structure. Owning a home can provide a sense of belonging, pride, stability, and a sense of permanence that makes families feel part of the community.



Having a home helps children feel rooted as they grow—knowing they will attend the same school and return to the same place at the end of each day. It helps to develop qualities like personal responsibility and self-confidence as they participate in caring for their family’s space.

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Centre County, celebrating its 40th year, makes the dream of home ownership a reality, thanks to a unique collaboration among donors, volunteers, and homebuyers. The organization has a dedicated organizational endowment at Centre Foundation—Habitat for Humanity of Greater Centre County Fund – which has been a critical annual source of funding since 2004, along with generous donor support during Centre Gives.

“To appreciate the impact of the program, it’s important to see the full picture,” said Executive Director Stephanie Fost. “Donors lay the foundation. From there, Habitat for Humanity doesn’t simply build a house for a family who can’t afford to buy one.” The process itself, in fact, is far more meaningful.

“Our homebuyers commit a minimum of 350 volunteer hours to work with our volunteer team and staff on their home and in the ReStore,”

Stephanie said. “They work alongside our construction team, investing their time and energy into their future home.” Not all homes are built from scratch; some are existing properties that are purchased and renovated.

Many homeowners put in these hours in addition to full-time jobs and caring for their children. “Our homebuyers are active members of our community—they work in our local schools, at the university, and at local businesses. Their family circumstances combined with the local housing market have made purchasing a home through traditional means too difficult. They’ve simply come into home ownership on a different path.”

According to Stephanie, many homebuyers are single parents. One recent homebuyer is a single mom who was sleeping on the couch in a rental unit that she shared with her young children and her sister who is disabled. Now, for the first time in three years, she has a bedroom. Because all homes built through the program are designed for residents to age in place, it is ADA accessible—with wide hallways and a large bathroom—allowing the homebuyer to continue to care for her sister.



Stephanie sees the impact of home ownership every time she drives by the home of the first homebuyer she worked with when she began her role at Habitat for Humanity. “The home was for a family of seven that had been living in a 3-bedroom apartment. Now, their yard has a playset, a garden, and a chicken coop... it’s truly become a home.”

With funds received by Centre County from the American Rescue Plan, combined with a Field-of-Interest grant funded by the Ed & Charlene Friedman Family Fund, Habitat for Humanity is also helping homeowners tackle critical repairs.

The Habitat team is assessing 60+ homes across the county with issues ranging from wiring, plumbing, and sewer issues to leaky roofs, unsafe structures, and lack of accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Many applications for the repairs program are from seniors and individuals with disabilities. Fortunately, as part of the site visit, the Habitat

team can help refer individuals to other organizations to determine if they qualify for additional services.

“It’s been a good way to look at the bigger picture facing many people across the county,” she said. “

The ReStore, another program of Habitat for Humanity, is located in Bellefonte and is celebrating its 15th year. During its last fiscal year, the ReStore helped to keep 250 tons of items from landfills by selling donated new and used home improvement items and materials at discounted prices. Profits go back to its mission of providing quality homes to working deserving local families.

The ReStore welcomes thousands of customers every month and boasts a volunteer crew that donates nearly 8,000 hours per year.

“Despite what people are used to seeing in photos, to help someone in your community through Habitat for Humanity, you don’t have to swing a hammer,” Stephanie said. 🌱



# OUR MISSION

*To inspire and facilitate a culture of giving and engagement that cultivates a vibrant, equitable, and inclusive community.*



*Left to right: Centre Foundation staff members Krista Williams, Rachael Hartman, Kerry Tolton, Tricia Penlington, Carrie Ryan, Madeleine Saldaña, Molly Kunkel (not pictured, Allison Wulfhorst)*

## President's Message

I am in awe of the power of voices. They are more than just sounds; they are the threads that weave the fabric of our community, the stories that shape our shared narrative, and the driving force behind Centre Foundation. As you've read these stories, I hope you've found that this publication is a testament to the voices that have shaped our journey – a celebration of the collective power of voices coming together in harmony to create a more engaged, vibrant, equitable, and inclusive community for all.

In my years at the foundation, I have seen firsthand the strength and inspiration in voices. Not only the voices of donors, nonprofit leaders, community volunteers, and local residents, but also the 'voices' of preserved farmland, rescued animals, public art, and public spaces, which are expressed by the residents who engage with those aspects of our community every day. Centre Foundation is committed to ensuring that all voices are heard, valued, and empowered to be catalysts for positive change.

This publication is not a typical report; it's a collection of stories and experiences that resonate with the very essence of who we are as a community foundation. Centre Foundation's staff and board have worked together for over 40 years to enhance life in Centre County. Their efforts inspire me every day, and I am honored to be working with them to create a better future.

Thank you for being a part of this journey, for sharing your voice, and for helping us amplify the voices of those who need it most. Together, we are making a lasting impact, and our community is richer for it.

With gratitude and anticipation for the voices yet to be heard,  
*Molly Kunkel*  
*President & CEO, Centre Foundation*



## Awards & Recognition

We are proud to share the accolades we have recently received, none of which would have been possible without the support of community members like you.



Centre Gives—Voted “Best Fundraising Event in State College” for nine years in a row by *State College Magazine*



Voted one of Central Pennsylvania’s “Top 100 Organizations” for four years in a row by *Pennsylvania Business Central*



Centre Foundation has been accredited for having organizational and financial practices that are in compliance with the National Standards for U.S. Community Foundations.

## Want to Get Involved?

Let’s collaborate. Join us to make a greater impact in our community!

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*On the cover: Justin Dorsey, Assistant Director for  
3 Dots Downtown, creates music in Penns Valley  
as part of 3 Dots' community outreach.*