



SPECIAL REPORT



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AS PART OF OUR EFFORT TO ASSESS THE RESULTS OF TRUST grants, we asked one of our staff members, a former journalist, to do an investigative report on several grants the Trust had made in a single small town. Her assignment was to see how the individual grants had turned out, search for influences the grants may have had beyond their immediate purpose, and explore whether there was any kind of collective effect of the grants within the community.

Her report was so interesting that we decided to share it with a larger audience by printing it in this annual report. Rather than the usual brief descriptions of what grants are intended to accomplish, this report shows how several grants actually played out over a period of time and also reveals some of the personal and social dramas that are part of real life grant projects.

The report also stimulates a number of challenging questions for grantmakers. Moving beyond the context of individual projects and looking at how a grant relates to the larger, more complicated environment of the whole community gives a different perspective on grantmaking. We must now endeavor to better understand this perspective and decide how it should guide our future decisions.

Charles S. Rooks  
*Executive Director*



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# THE TRUST IN FLORENCE

*by Marie Deatherage*

THE DISARMING FRIENDLINESS OF A SMALL town was evident from my first stop in Florence at the Siuslaw Public Library to see the “Tot Spot,” funded by a Trust grant in 1996. Karen Preuss insisted on meeting me there to show me around, even though she had resigned two weeks earlier as the library’s first children’s librarian in order to move back to her family’s home in Maine, and was up to her elbows in packing.

“This library has tremendous support from the community,” Preuss explained as she escorted me past the stacks of bookshelves. “It’s one of the three main reasons people decide to retire here, the other two being the Events Center and the hospital. When people from bigger cities see what a high level of service this little town offers in the way of a library and performing arts and health care, they are really impressed.”

I had gone to Florence in early March this year to explore the effect of a combination of several Meyer Trust grants on a small community in Oregon. I hoped to learn what difference we have made. How did people in the community view our contributions? Did the totality of our efforts equal more than the sum of the parts?

What I saw suggested a holistic way of looking at grants—as part of communities, of ecosystems

really, where doing something in one place affects other parts in some way, with implications far beyond the anticipated or intended results.

In order to understand what our grants have meant to the community, I found I needed to try to understand Florence. In addition to the extensive conversations I had with our grantees, I spoke at length with two people who can usually be counted on to have the big picture in small towns—the newspaper publisher and the city manager.

## ABOUT FLORENCE

Florence is a small community on the Oregon coast along the north side of the estuary formed where the Siuslaw River flows into the Pacific Ocean. It was originally a timber and fishing community, though its economy was always significantly eclipsed by larger seaports to the south and north. Florence has historically provided services to residents of western Lane County, both those up the Siuslaw River to the east and customers along the coastal highway. Nearby spectacular expanses of sand dunes and remarkably rugged headland rock formations also made this area an early tourist destination. Besides advertising its nearby natural wonders, Florence itself has attempted to become a

tourist Mecca of sorts in the past few years, revitalizing its Old Town, a few blocks of shops and restaurants that include some of the town's oldest buildings.

Florence has more than tripled its population in the past three and a half decades, from a modest 1,642 in 1960 to 6,570 in 1997. Several thousand more people live in Florence's service area. The greatest rate of growth occurred during the 1970s, when it was "discovered" as a retirement community and in-migration nearly doubled the size of the town.

Florence remains one of Oregon's fastest growing small communities, with an increase of nearly 28 percent between 1990-97. Most of the increase resulted from in-migration. The trend is likely to continue. "I just heard that a national publication is going to come out with an article soon that names Florence as one of the top five retirement destinations in the country," Florence City Manager Ken Hobson told me.

And according to Karen Preuss, the quality of the community's library is one thing that makes retirees choose Florence.

#### SIUSLAW PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Siuslaw Public Library replaced the Florence Public Library that had been operating in town since 1915. The Siuslaw Public Library District was established as a separate entity with taxing authority in 1985, to create a more stable funding base drawing financial support from the entire area that it serves, which is substantially larger than the City of Florence itself.

No longer competing with other city agencies in budget negotiations, the library has enjoyed

strong support from voters as they have consistently approved operating levies. The library moved into a brand new facility in 1990, with vastly increased space and services. "The voters have been very generous with the library," Preuss noted, "although that's not necessarily true of schools and other services for local children. A lot of voters aren't so generous with their tax dollars for programs targeted for children."

Because she had noticed that many more retirees, who are among the area's relatively more affluent residents, were using the library than the many families of the "working poor" who live in and around Florence, Preuss sought a grant from the Meyer Trust to reach out to some of those families who did not often visit the library. The grant the Meyer Trust made was a small one of \$6,600, to help establish an early childhood

learning area and parent resource center in the library.

"We wanted to get families into the library and to start them reading to their children when they are just babies and to provide parenting information to new parents in a friendly, inviting environment," Preuss said. A larger goal of the project is to foster literacy in young children by supporting family literacy activities.

One of the project's activities was to produce and distribute packets to families that included information about the library's resources, a booklet about the importance of reading to children, a copy of a magazine for families with young children, and a library card application, along with a certificate that entitles children to a brand new board book when they return a completed application to the library. The packets are distributed to new mothers at the local

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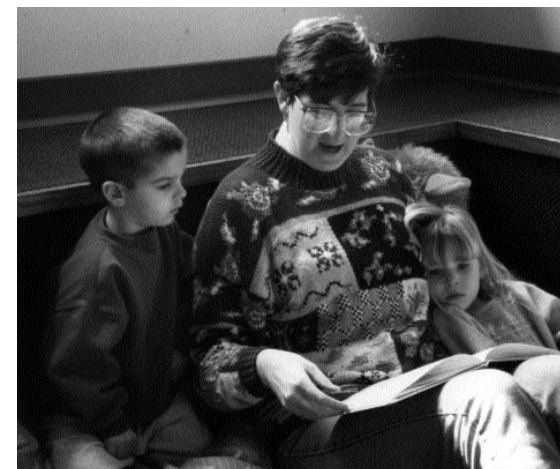
—KAREN PREUSS, FORMER CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN, SIUSLAW PUBLIC LIBRARY

hospital maternity ward, and to area agencies serving young children like Head Start, Healthy Start, PACE and other local preschools and child care centers.

According to Preuss, the Tot Spot, designed as a colorful and welcoming space, helps families who are unfamiliar with libraries overcome their feelings of intimidation about using the facility. "This project effectively reaches a previously unserved population within our community," she said.

The grant purchased 300 board books and a storage cabinet for holding and displaying them, as well as puppets and toys to use as storytelling props and to entertain young children while parents read or browse library materials. The area includes a new collection of parenting resources, including books, videos, and magazines purchased with Trust grant funds.

While I was there, a mother in her early 20s with three young children age four or younger entered the Tot Spot. "Oh, good," Preuss exclaimed, "one of my favorite families!" She invited the children to join her in the reading corner on the floor, and held them in the thrall of a picture book she read aloud. "Read us



Karen Preuss, former children's librarian at Siuslaw Public Library, reads aloud to children visiting the Tot Spot.

another!" the two oldest clamored, as soon as she turned the last page.

"Okay, one more," she agreed, and leaving her packing behind for a bit longer, started a second story while the young mother browsed the nearby bookshelves. "See, this grant is working," Preuss seemed to say as she smiled up at me from the reading nook on the floor, one child in her lap, another snuggled up at her side, and the toddler playing nearby with a toy from the lending library.

The Trust grant had a significantly larger impact, generating so much enthusiasm for and interest in the needs of families with young children that the local Healthy Start program donated a large collection of toys that has become a toy lending library, used by families who can't afford to buy new toys for their children and by grandparents whose grandchildren visit occasionally. The Siuslaw Family Resource Center also donated its collection of parenting books because of the Meyer Trust grant.

#### TWO FLORENCES

Karen Preuss would not be the last person to call attention to the differences between local residents who had grown up in the Florence area and were still trying to support their families with their earnings, and those who have chosen it as a place to live in retirement, living on lifetime earnings from other more affluent places.

While Florence has become more attractive as a place to retire, it's become more difficult to earn enough of a living to raise a family there. Income growth in Florence did not keep pace with Oregon's or the nation's during the past decade. Median household income in 1990 was \$18,991 in Florence, \$27,250 in Oregon, and \$30,056 for the U.S. About 18 percent of households are below the poverty level in the Siuslaw Public School District, while the figure is only 12 percent for Oregon and 13 for the U.S. In 1990 nearly one-third of students enrolled in

Siuslaw public schools were at or below the federal poverty level. The Oregon Department of Economic Analysis estimates that about 52 percent of residents in Florence could be classified as low or moderate income, and the number would be higher for the surrounding rural area.

Employment in natural resource industries such as wood products and fishing has decreased in recent years. In Lane County, there was a 34 percent decline in lumber and wood products employment between 1989 and 1996, while the Oregon economy experienced dramatic growth during the same period. Especially in areas along the coast like Florence, retirement income and tourism are of increasing importance to the local economy. Growth of the retirement sector has added employment in retail trade and services, especially health care. Half of Oregon's new jobs projected between now and 2005 will be in service industries, but that percentage is expected to be significantly higher in tourist and residential retirement communities like Florence.

Karen Lynn, director of Florence's food bank, sees the results of Florence's changing economy every day. In fact, she describes two populations in Florence. "There is the retired population, who moved here and are living off money made earlier. And there are families struggling to live here off service sector wages. The cost of living is very high here, there is some subsidized housing, but not much," she said.

"People want to live here, to raise their families here, but they really have to struggle to do so," Lynn explained. "Most of our clients are working poor, there are no family wage jobs left."

City Manager Hobson conceded life is different for retirees and working families. His office

recently conducted a community-wide survey, and "the single biggest difference between retirees and non-retirees is that retirees want local shopping opportunities," Hobson said. "They don't care to drive the 60 miles to Eugene or other shopping centers, and they have more expendable income. Working people are more interested in new job opportunities, growth in that sector."

Nevertheless, Hobson is not convinced there are always clear cut differences between residents who are retired and those who are still working, and wonders if it might be that the needs of the more vocal group are simply better known.

"We've been trying to figure out exactly what are the demographics of the working poor," he said. "Many families are struggling financially, you don't hear or see too much about them. They are kind of an invisible part of the community. The people with the most focus and energy move their agendas forward, those are the ones we hear from the most."

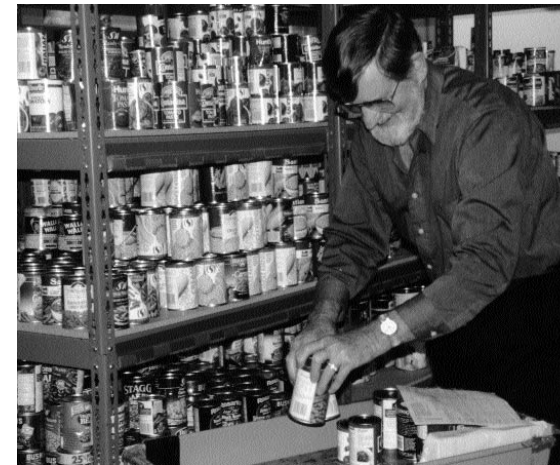
#### FLORENCE FOOD SHARE

I met some of the "working poor" that Karen Lynn, Ken Hobson, and Karen Preuss had described when I visited Florence Food Share. The small waiting room was filled with about a dozen adults, both young and old, and a few children. A handful of others waited in the parking lot, in cars that had seen far better days. They sat quietly waiting while in another room, retired volunteers filled boxes with foods from a list compiled for each client. Menus are provided, along with all items needed to prepare meals for the entire family for a week.

When I was there, two retirees who had moved to Florence from Eugene were filling

*"Many families are struggling financially, you don't hear or see too much about them. They are kind of an invisible part of the community."*

— KEN HOBSON,  
FLORENCE CITY MANAGER



Florence Food Share volunteer Cal Johnson selects canned goods to fill a food box for one of Florence's working poor families.

boxes. Cal Johnson selected canned goods from the brimming shelves, while his wife Lois removed frozen chickens and other items from the freezer. Bread and other baked goods are also available, along with fresh fruit and vegetables.

Florence Food Share is open Monday through Friday, from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. At least 150 people walk through the door every day. The food bank, part of the Oregon Food Bank network, distributes approximately 350 boxes to household units each month. It also purchases \$5 Safeway food vouchers, and gives some to the local police to hand out to destitute people. Vouchers are also supplied to Siuslaw Women's Center.

Florence Food Share used a \$23,500 Meyer Trust grant to help construct its building. Previously, it had operated out of a small community center but had been asked to vacate the space because it was needed by the center's own programs. Land for the new facility was donated by the New Life Lutheran Church, and volunteers raised an additional \$68,000 in small donations from the community. Trust funds were used to complete and equip the building, which opened its doors in March 1993. "Without the Meyer Memorial Trust grant the

building would be completed, but basically a shell," former Florence Food Share President Bill Sibbett said.

The new space enabled the food bank to operate more efficiently. Previously, it had to store food in several residential garages around the community, and shortage of space prevented it from ordering in larger, more economical quantities. Now it orders food half as often, and makes many fewer trips to collect it.

According to former President Sibbett, "It is wonderful to be under one roof. Previously, when serving clients we would run out of one thing or another and then it was a scramble as to where a back-up supply was located and who had the keys and where it might be found. Now everything has its place and the back-up supply is in sight. The effect on both clients and volunteers is axiomatic. Morale is high. Now there are smiles..."

I asked Karen Lynn if she could tell me one thing, an anecdote or account that captures the essence of Florence Food Share. She paused for a moment, thinking, then said, "I guess it would be the time a woman came in at closing time, she was a new client, with four kids, she just had surgery on her foot, and was still limping.



Florence Food Share's garden, located in a clearing behind the Food Share building, supplies families with fresh produce.

Her husband wouldn't even come in, he was too ashamed, he had been out of work for a while. I think they were all living in their van. Even though it was later in the day than we like to take new clients, we did an intake."

Lynn's voice broke and her eyes welled up, "When we brought out the box filled to the brim with food, she broke down into tears. I could really see what we were doing meant to this woman. I could see it was hard for her to swallow her pride and ask for help."

"When things like this happen," she added, "it makes us feel good about what we do here."

Florence Food Share supplements its offerings with produce from its own garden, planted in a 50 x 100 foot space cleared from the forest of shrubs and coast pines next

to the food bank. A gardener starts seeds in the greenhouse, then transplants young seedlings to the adjacent beds. In March spinach, chard, and onions were thriving, and although there are some plants that cannot be grown in the relatively cool coastal climate, during summer the beds are filled with a variety of vegetables.

Lynn said she plans to have another 100 x 100 foot lot cleared so the garden can be enlarged. She is worried that the supply of donated produce is not always reliable and wants to ensure that her agency is always able to provide clients with a well-balanced diet.

As a result of the successful completion of the new food bank, four new churches began to support its efforts with donations of food and cash. The community's Good Friday offering for Florence Food Share in 1993 was twice that of 1992.

President Bill Sibbett summed up the impact of the Trust grant in the Florence Food Share

well: "The project demonstrated to us that a partnership of a strong community backed by responsive organizations like Meyer Memorial Trust will support good causes even in days when the economy is depressed and the future is uncertain. The project was featured almost weekly in our local paper and this high profile has provided community support in the form of increasing funds for food and an increasing number of volunteers."

#### FLORENCE EVENTS CENTER

Ask anyone in Florence what single thing has made the most difference in the community in the past few years, and nearly everyone gives the same answer—the Events Center. In fact, soon after it opened the local weekly newspaper called it "a place

where people come together to express themselves in a variety of ways" and "to gather and celebrate ourselves as a community."

In a prominent editorial, the local newspaper noted that within six months of opening, the Events Center had established itself as the "heart of our town" and "our place to gather as a community to discuss the things we hold important, to learn, to be entertained by the performing and fine arts, and often, just to come together."

According to General Manager Joseph Kerr, so far the center has greatly exceeded all performance expectations. "During the first year of operation," he said, "we projected 135 events. We actually had 271, and the demand hasn't let up." Revenue from facility rental is 50 percent higher than expected. This year, 30 days of conferences hosted by out-of-town groups were scheduled, up from 11 the first year. "There is new interest in Florence as a conference

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— KAREN LYNN,  
DIRECTOR, FLORENCE FOOD BANK

destination as a result of the center," Kerr added.

Paul Holman, publisher of the community's weekly *Siuslaw News*, agrees that the Events Center has made a very significant impact in Florence. "It's been beating all our expectations," he said. "It's a wildly successful venture. We now have events that normally did not happen in Florence because it lacked a facility."

It has not all been smooth sailing. In fact, when Kerr arrived in town to take the general manager's job, he faced an immediate crisis – he found that the architect had underestimated the cost of the project by \$800,000, only the county had committed funds, all public entities were short of money because of the recently passed property tax limitation, and some pledges that had been made were uncollectable.

Kerr was tempted to turn heel and run. He had left a good job in Nevada and uprooted his family to take this position and start a new life in Florence. "But we took a leap of faith and decided to go for it," he said, ruefully shaking his head at the memory. "First we cut costs by scaling back the project, deleting the storeroom and some office space, we redesigned the front entrance, and streamlined some other parts."

"Then came the big breakthrough, the Meyer Trust grant, the largest single grant by far," he said. That's when the project turned the corner. "It was a real shot in the arm, credibility-wise," Kerr explained. "It was real money, it got noticed, and it gave other donors faith in us."

The project had not enjoyed unqualified support from the public. In fact, the advisory vote that guided the City Council to go forward with the project passed by only 78 votes out of some 4,000.

"There was a lot of support from people who

had moved here from someplace else," Kerr said. "But for local residents who'd never been out of the area, it was not a priority in their lives." In fact, a former mayor wrote a letter to the editor questioning, "Do we have our priorities straight here? Is this a luxury we can't really afford until we take care of some of the community's 'basic' problems?"

Florence has some fairly significant problems.

According to City Manager Ken Hobson, the city is facing a major lawsuit and is under orders from Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality to replace its wastewater treatment plant.

"We also need to expand our drinking water production capacity," Hobson said. "It's not a supply problem,

it's a quality problem." Hobson says the fundamental challenges result from the town's rapid growth, which has eaten up the city's reserve fund. "We're now in reduction mode," he said, "we have a real general fund problem."

Kerr says the initial negative attitude toward the Events Center on the part of many long-time local residents has changed. "Almost weekly," he noted, "a different local resident stops by the office to say that while opposed to the center originally, thinking that it may be too much of a burden to a small city and its taxpayers, the number of activities and what it means to our town have won him over."

The Events Center includes a 500-seat theater and adjoining meeting space that can accommodate groups up to 500 but can be easily partitioned into intimate spaces for small groups of 20 or less. It also offers catering and other conference services.

The Trust grant included an outright gift of \$135,000 that was used to purchase a sound system, stage rigging and curtains, and visual

*"In only six months, the Florence Events Center has established itself as the heart of our town."*

— SIUSLAW NEWS EDITORIAL



The Florence Events Center.

art display systems. The additional \$100,000 was a challenge grant, and it was used to supplement and complete the installation of the above items. Although initially worried about the center's ability to meet the challenge, Kerr is now grateful the Trust made part of its grant a challenge. He pointed out that without the \$100,000 leveraged with the Trust's challenge grant, the Events Center would not be able to host conferences, large receptions or dinners.

Scores of community, private and commercial activities have occurred since the center opened Aug. 31, 1996, including locally produced theatrical performances by students and nonprofit organizations, a successful subscription concert series, a monthly Celtic music series, and performances of the Eugene Ballet Company and Eugene Symphony. In addition, members of the community have used its facilities for meetings, seminars, lectures, official receptions, public hearings, wedding receptions, holiday dances and parties. A local church holds its services there.

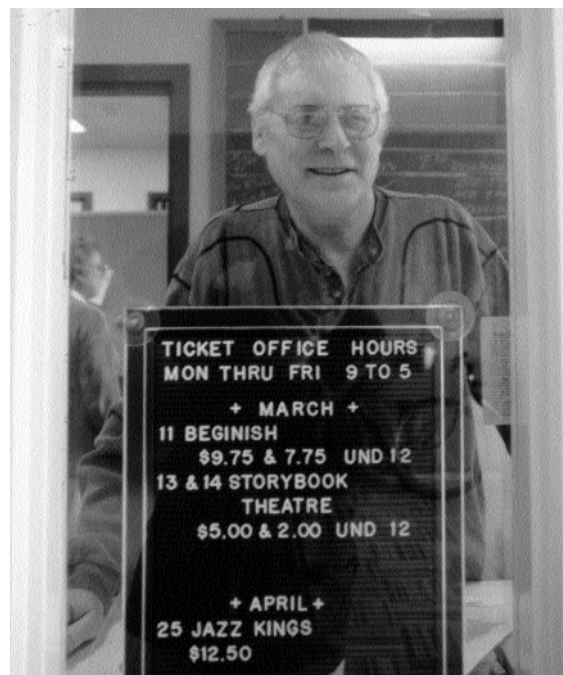
Before the Events Center was built, all plays and concerts in Florence had to take place at a church or the high school auditorium, which lacked adequate space and seating, and offered no lighting, sound, or means of hanging curtains or scenic backdrops. According to Holman, a community concert series that had been struggling to keep its membership and survive as an organization is now thriving

because it attracts much larger audiences in the theater at the Events Center. Now school performances are held at the center's theater, accommodating larger audiences and providing students with real theatrical production experience, as they operate the lighting and sound equipment and perform all the other production tasks.

When I asked Joe Kerr for an example that captures the essence of the Events Center, he paused for a moment, then said, "It has to be the volunteers. We have people who work full time for no pay and then thank us for letting them volunteer."

"Sometimes these same people overhear us talking about something we need that's not in the budget," he continued, "and then I find a personal check made out for that amount sitting on my desk the next morning."

He told me about George Weber, who volun-



Volunteer George Weber mans the ticket window at the Florence Events Center.

teers 45 hours each week, running the ticket office, helping with theater productions, showing visitors around the facility. I asked if he was there, if I could speak with him, take his photograph. "I'm sure George is here," Kerr replied with a laugh. "But he's pretty shy and quiet about what he does, he doesn't like calling attention to himself, so I don't know if he'll let you take his picture."

George Weber proved to be a willing though modest interviewee. I learned that he had moved to Florence from southern California after retirement, and found himself sitting at home with nothing to do. "I couldn't do lots of reading because of my eye problems," he said. At first he helped out at the local historical museum but "they tried to put me in charge, and I didn't want to be." Weber saw an announcement in the local paper calling for volunteers at the soon-to-be-open

Events Center, and the rest is history. He got involved with the very first production at the center (he designed and made costumes for *The Music Man*), and he's been working there full time ever since. Weber says he was always interested in the theater, and when he was younger, had done some modeling and attended acting school.

That evening when I arrived at 6:15 to take photos during the Florence Children's Theater rehearsal of *Cinderella*, Weber was still there, overseeing things from a seat in the auditorium. He also leads tours through the center, and especially enjoys seeing how "totally amazed people are when they see the wonderful theater this little town has."

The generous supply of volunteer support means operating costs are minimized, and ticket prices are lower than they would be otherwise.

#### PEACE HARBOR HOSPITAL HOSPICE

Peace Harbor Hospital is Florence's 21-bed acute care facility that is part of the Sisters of St. Joseph health system. In collaboration with local physicians, the hospital formed a managed care system that is the single source of primary and acute care for the approximately 18,000 residents of this area, which is designated as "medically underserved" by the Oregon Health Division.

As part of its strategic planning process in 1994, the hospital surveyed the community to determine its unmet health care needs. Hospice care was identified as the most significant missing element, and the hospital's board selected it as the one new program it would work to add during 1995. That choice was likely influenced by the fact that Florence is increasingly becoming a retirement

community populated by older citizens.

A Meyer Trust grant of \$25,000 in January 1995 was used to develop a program to train the initial volunteers and staff members. With this formal training program, it was able to gain certification by the Oregon Hospice Association and qualify for private insurance and Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement, which provides ongoing funding.

Last year the Florence hospice program served 57 individuals and their families, using three dedicated hospice staff members and 26 volunteers who directly assisted patients. The volunteers undergo rigorous preparation, receiving 40 hours of instruction over a 10-week period.

Hospice care begins with the diagnosis of a terminal illness with life expectancy of six months or less if the disease follows its expected

*"We have people who work full time for no pay and then thank us for letting them volunteer."*

— JOE KERR, GENERAL MANAGER,  
EVENTS CENTER



Ernest Foster, pictured above with a care provider from the Peace Harbor Hospice program, died at home on November 20, 1995.

course, with patient and family agreement on the hospice philosophy of care and referral from the patient's primary care physician. Hospice philosophy respects the patient's wishes, honors the role of the family and is guided by the desire to assist in providing an atmosphere for living and dying that meets the specific needs of each patient and family. Comfort measures and pain management are the primary physical goals, but the patient and family are also supported emotionally and spiritually.

Hospice aims to improve quality of life, rather than seeking rehabilitation. Sometimes volunteers perform tasks like chopping wood, gardening, providing transportation to and

from the doctor, and give much-needed respite to caregivers. Hospice helps people travel, working with other hospice organizations to facilitate a last trip the patient dreams of making. Since many people desire a last visit to the Oregon coast, Florence's hospice program cooperates with similar agencies by providing direct services to those visiting the coast from other areas.

Executive Director Susan Schroeder says there are many examples of her agency's success, but one experience stands out.

"There was a man visiting Florence in a motor home who became so ill he was going to have to curtail his trip. He was in so much pain he vomited every time he moved," Schroeder said. "He came to our program, and we were able to provide him with a transdermal compound of pain medications in a gel that could be applied by family members. So he didn't have to give up his trip after all, and by the end of the week, he was eating enchiladas with his family!"

#### WHERE THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

My visit to Florence proved to me that it is useful to understand something of the nature of a community to anticipate the effect of making grants there.

For example, if we accept the premise that some in Florence hold that there are indeed two Florences—one of retirees, another of those still working—it might first appear that the bulk of the Trust's grants to the community have made it more attractive as a place to retire. Three of the four grants described above went to institutions that are identified by many in the community as the three most important factors in retirees choosing Florence as their new home. As more and more relatively affluent retirees migrate to the area, the cost of land, housing, and goods and services rise, following the law of supply and demand. And as the cost

of living is driven higher, working families living on service sector wages must struggle more.

Which might lead one to ask if assistance to the library, hospice program, and Events Center has inadvertently contributed to an environment that has favored retirees while increasing financial pressures on the working poor.

But certainly the decline in natural resource based industries and lack of family wage jobs is not caused by in-migration.

And as these industries decline, at least the arrival of newcomers creates job growth in the service sector. In fact, shouldn't the increased need for housing be creating higher-paying construction jobs, as retirement communities grow?

According to the Florence city manager, not nearly as much as one might expect.

"The construction industry definitely benefits the most, and it is the most prosperous sector," Hobson explained, "but most of the new construction is manufactured homes. For every stick built house in Florence, there are two manufactured homes put up. That's principally due to some major gated communities that cater to manufactured homes only. A lot of retirees don't feel they want to go out and buy a house that costs more than \$100,000. They'd rather have a house that costs less that's inside a gated community, with a pool and other amenities."

Florence officials expressed an interest in learning the results of a grant the Trust recently made to the Wallowa County Health Care Foundation to build a home for its physician residency in Enterprise. A corollary goal of the grant is to demonstrate that "stick-built" construction can compete economically with a manufactured home.

Nor is tourism bringing in as much money to the city coffers as one might expect. "There

is a lot of competition on the tourism side among the communities on the coast," Hobson explained. "Some of them have huge war chests, but the City of Florence's share of the Lane County room tax last year was only \$85,000. We've felt we can't add a city tax on top of that because we need to keep the local room rates low so Florence can compete with other coastal destinations for tour groups, conventions, and so forth."

A closer look at the grants the Trust has made, however, reveals not only an awareness of the needs of the more silent members of the community on the part of Florence's grantseekers, but a desire to use the grants to facilitate joining the two parts of the town into a whole community. These grants show

that some visionary local people are looking out for the needs of the entire community and striving to bring divergent pieces together.

The purpose of the grant to Siuslaw Public Library, for example, was to try to attract underserved families with young children to the library. The grant was instigated by the children's librarian who noticed that working families were underutilizing the services of the institution their tax dollars were supporting.

At the food bank, much of the work is done by volunteers who are retired. The average age of a food bank worker is 62, and many are in their 70s. Without their contributed labor and cash donations, the food bank would not be able to provide food to nearly as many of the community's poor.

Although it is true that affluent citizens often enjoy more and better health care services than those less well off, the Oregon Health Plan, which was supported in its earliest stage of development by Meyer Trust grants, makes

*These grants show that some visionary local people are looking out for the needs of the entire community and striving to bring divergent pieces together.*

hospice services more accessible and available than before to lower-income residents. Without the Trust grant to Peace Harbor Hospital, no one in Florence would have access to hospice services.

And even though the Events Center came about as the result of the efforts of the more vocal members of the community as described by City Manager Hobson, there is real awareness on the part of center staff and supporters that some members of the community are less able to afford the cost of some of its events. The donated labor of community retirees helps significantly reduce ticket prices.

The staff is determined to make a place that is the true center of the community. To a large extent, it appears they have succeeded. School plays are held there, attended by parents of children from all economic groups. City meetings are conducted there. At some events, the price of admission is cans of food for the food bank.

While the gap between retirees and working families still exists, newspaper publisher Holman feels it has been reduced now that the city has a clearly defined place where the twain consistently meet, at the Events Center.

#### WHAT NEXT?

Florence is still grappling with substantial infrastructure problems, particularly in its water and sewer systems. The city manager also pointed out the need for services for youth in the community. “There are especially few services for children in this community,” he said. “There was a very minimal recreation program for preteen kids for two and a half months in the summer, but as of last year, the city said we can no longer afford even that.”

Beginning this summer, a Meyer Trust grant

will help pay for a modest youth program in Florence. A two-year \$50,000 grant to the Lane Arts Council for summer arts programs for children in five rural communities in Lane County is allocating \$3,000 for offerings in Florence this summer. Trust funds will be supplemented with grants from other foundations and local private contributions, but no city

tax dollars will be used. The elementary school has agreed to provide classroom space for four weeks of sessions during late July and early August. More than 80 students in grades one through eight will participate in 24 classes offered by local artists in ceramics, drawing, painting, and mixed media. Lane Arts Council has provided intensive training to a few Florence teens, who will be employed as classroom assistants in the program.

Both Hobson and newspaper publisher Holman cited the need for increased services for youth and a community swimming pool. “That is the next thing on the list of community desires,” Holman said. “For the last few months a group of people have been meeting informally to try to get a campaign going. A group tried 20 or 30 years ago to get one and failed.”

“We’re sorting out multiple needs, and trying to figure out which ones people are willing to pay for,” Hobson continued. He explained that the tax base in Florence has been very low, and city service levels have been minimal. “The library has fared better since it became its own district, it has its own supporters, but other things the city has done have been at a bare minimum.”

In July 1998, the Meyer Trust supported a move to directly address the lack of services for youth with a \$50,000 grant to establish a new Boys and Girls Club in Florence and help support its operations for the first three years.

*“It is time to raise money  
for our kids.”*

— EVENTS CENTER  
FUNDRAISING LEADER

Citizens of the community have already contributed more than \$30,000 for the program, and the leaders who successfully raised funds for the Events Center have stepped forward to garner support for the Boys and Girls Club.

As one of them recently said, “It is time to raise money for our kids.”

#### LARGER LESSONS

Many of the issues that surfaced during my exploration in Florence are being faced by communities all across Oregon—problems such as shortage of family wage jobs, decaying infrastructure, rapid population growth combined with declining services and voter opposition to taxes, aging voters electing not to fund programs for needy children, increasing gaps between “haves” and “have nots,” and the splintering of communities into different groups with increasingly specialized interests.

These subjects frequently are raised in conversations among Oregonians, often leading many to ask what can be done and who should do it? What is the role of foundations in addressing these issues? Which problems are both appropriate for foundation support and amenable to such outside assistance? Which issues are the sole obligation of government bodies and the local citizenry? What can foundations do to help people understand the extent and limits of foundation assistance?

There are no simple answers to questions like these. Foundations have an important but complicated role in the complex ecosystems of communities.

Using the example of Florence, there is both appreciation and confusion about the Meyer

Trust grants. Some citizens enthusiastically laud the help the Trust has given to particular projects. Others are puzzled when community voters aren’t willing to pay for services and basic needs go unmet, and yet a new innovative project that is seen as less important by some is able to attract foundation support. “Why is someone willing to give us money to build an Events Center that a lot of people won’t be able to afford to attend, when our sewers aren’t working,” some in Florence asked.

Like most foundations, the Meyer Trust expects local communities to look within themselves to provide their own basic services, and considers building municipal sewers, hiring police, or paving roads, to cite a few examples, to be outside its scope.

Foundations generally like to contribute to special programs that add something of distinctive value to a community or provide a one-time gift that stimulates interest in and ongoing support for a new service. In many cases, Meyer Trust awards may also provide a broader economic benefit to an area, as did the grant to the Florence Events Center by creating new opportunities for the city and its businesses to collect revenue from visitors attending conferences, meetings, or performances.

As the microcosm of Florence suggests, foundations should seek to better understand what their actions mean to places where they wield influence. And they need to do more to explain themselves and their role in society. Learning about Florence and the role the Trust has played there is a step toward finding the larger lessons in our work within a complex interconnected world.