

# Turning Passion Into Purpose

WITH THE CLEVELAND FOUNDATION

## “Noteworthy” women changing future of philanthropy

Embracing personal experience, passions and talent for the greater good of Greater Cleveland



Edith Anisfield Wolf

### Edith Anisfield Wolf Social Justice

As a social progressive, Cleveland poet and philanthropist Edith Anisfield Wolf founded in 1935 an annual prize for the best new books on racism, equity and diversity. Now in its 82nd year, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards has fostered a canon of indispensable works as the only national juried prize of its kind. Upon her death in 1963, Edith left her home to the Cleveland Welfare Association, her books to the Cleveland Public Library and her money to the Cleveland Foundation.

Edith's story is a watershed example of innovation, bravery and civic optimism. With the *Crain's* Women of Note Awards presented by the Cleveland Foundation on July 18, we take an opportunity to look upon modern-day women in philanthropy who are advancing the field and touching lives.

### Debra Green Corporate Responsibility

When Debra Green was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1995, she embraced this personal tragedy as a way to reach others and make a difference. As a survivor, Green still plays an integral role in education and screening campaigns at Medical Mutual, where she also serves as Vice President of Social Responsibility.

“In sharing, I believed I could help others,” Green said. “That turned into an initiative that Medical Mutual has supported for 20 years, underwriting the cost of community education events



Debra Green

and emphasizing the importance of early detection.”

Green said being at the helm of Medical Mutual's community giving has been a dream career, allowing her to draw on skills honed earlier as a social worker and human resources professional. The insurance company's philanthropic program has three pillars: employee giving and service, executive nonprofit board service and grantmaking.

“As an insurer, the welfare of our members, employees and communities is important to us,” Green said. “You don't have to go far to see Medical Mutual supporting a cause.”

She estimates that Medical Mutual executives are serving on at least 30 nonprofit boards. Green was an honorary co-chair of the Cleveland Foundation's previous two African-American Philanthropy Summits and said each event reinforced and celebrated what she learned from her mother and her church about charity.

“I was taught, whatever you have, you give a tenth back,” Green said. “It's a day of celebrating the deep history and tradition of giving in the African-American community. It goes back to family, love and relationships.”

### Beth Oldenburg Rankin Philanthropic Advocacy

For Beth Rankin, civic involvement and giving back is part of her DNA.

“Our parents provided wonderful examples and gave us a great deal of exposure to a variety of causes, and I



Beth Oldenburg Rankin

certainly hope that we're doing the same for our children,” she said of her family and husband, Clay.

Rankin - a native Clevelander - gravitated to causes tied to education, arts and culture as a way to deepen her community engagement. Particularly, she embraced the theater, which was important in her family growing up.

“Giving back is an opportunity to really practice what you believe,” she said. “You want to ensure that what you love will survive, and giving back provides new insights and joy.”

Rankin serves on the Cleveland Foundation Board of Directors and is chair of the Advancement Committee, which works with individuals, families and organizations to achieve their philanthropic goals. Through Organizational Funds, organizations can co-brand with the foundation and have access to its best-in-class fund managers.

“Our team of philanthropic experts is also able to assist these organizations with planned gifts from their donors,” Rankin said. “That can be of tremendous value to the organization, which is often a nonprofit that may benefit by having its endowment managed by the Cleveland Foundation.”

Rankin also serves as vice chair of the Cleveland Play House and is co-chair of its Spotlight Endowment Campaign. She has a private practice tutoring young adults who need to develop their expressive language skills.



Ellen Burts-Cooper, Ph.D.

### Ellen Burts-Cooper, Ph.D. Entrepreneurial Philanthropy

Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt Dr. Ellen Burts-Cooper runs her consulting business like a well-oiled machine. She also made nonprofit volunteering an early part of her philanthropy when she was still working in corporate America.

“I wouldn't want to give to an organization where a dollar went to clean up things that shouldn't have been wasteful in the first place,” she said. “So I began teaching nonprofits the Lean Six Sigma practices so they could apply them to reduce waste and improve quality.”

Today, Improve Consulting and Training Group has seven core team members serving more than 80 clients in numerous industries across the country. For Dr. Burts-Cooper, there are many parallels between the realities of starting a business and being philanthropic.

“You want to be creative about how you give, and you also want to make sure that your dollars create ripple effects with their impact,” she said. “People want to know that their giving is going to be far-reaching.”

Her giving began at an early age. In graduate school, Dr. Burts-Cooper would help buy books for local high school students. Then she began funding a scholarship in her 30s and aligned with the Cleveland Foundation for philanthropic support. Today, the Bagby, Palmer Memorial Scholarship helps students in Cleveland's inner-ring suburbs attend college.

“When I was just a kid, my mom once



Sally Gries

### Sally Gries Charitable Investing

said, ‘One day, you'll be able to give away a sum of money, and you won't miss it, but the person you give it to won't ever forget,’” Dr. Burts-Cooper said. “I never believed it, and then one day, we were in that position when the business had done well.”

Dr. Burts-Cooper is staying true to this wisdom by chairing the foundation's African-American Philanthropy Committee and helping design its hallmark Summit on April 28.

Sally Gries, founder of Gries Financial, has applied her extensive wealth management and analytics experience to help other philanthropists in the nonprofit world. She currently serves on the Cleveland Foundation Board of Directors, is chair of the Investments Committee, and a member of the Advancement Committee.

“We provide a platform for giving that helps donors leverage their dollars for maximum charitable impact,” Gries said. “We have identified goal-based strategies that can help donors grow their personal endowments at a rate that's greater than their grantmaking.”

Gries said she was attracted to the foundation because of its role as a major collaborator in many Cleveland projects, pointing to the Cleveland Plan for Transforming Public Schools and neighborhood revitalization as two of her favorite initiatives.

“We have a chance to get our renaissance right,” Gries said. “But we have to bring our neighborhoods along and stress income diversity.”

For those looking to get involved in the community, Gries says it's really as simple as following your passion.

“The key is bringing together your skill set and interests,” she said. “If you feel you could make a difference and that your time would be effectively used, then that's an area you should pursue.”

Sally and her husband, Bob, personally selected the Cleveland Foundation as their charitable partner and also present the “Robert D. Gries Keynote Lecture” at the foundation's annual meeting, which is free and open to the public.

To learn more about giving through the Cleveland Foundation, please call 877-554-5054.

## GROWING WITH PURPOSE FOR 103 YEARS

Established in 1914 as the world's first community foundation, the Cleveland Foundation has helped Greater Clevelanders turn their passion into purpose for more than a century. The foundation is one of Ohio's largest grantmakers and one of the largest community foundations in the country, with assets of \$2.1 billion and 2016 grants of \$93.6 million.

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