



Community Foundation News
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**Lee Wetherington Foundation:
A donor's generosity increases despite a tight economy**

Grants of \$760,000 since 2002 help to meet diverse community needs

SARASOTA, FL—Home builders have been among the hardest hit in the current economic downturn, but that hasn't stopped one area builder from remembering those in need. Lee Wetherington, founder and president of Lee Wetherington Homes--named America's Best Builder--has often been recognized for his decades of philanthropic activities. He has contributed a portion of proceeds from home sales to charities almost since he began building homes in 1979; it would take more than a business slowdown to make him change. "We socked away whatever we could during the good times so we've been able to help those in need during the not-so-good times," Wetherington says.

One way he did this was by establishing the **Lee Wetherington Foundation, administered by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, in 2002.**

Wetherington funded his foundation's operations with three gifts of \$1 million, contributed in 2002, 2004 and 2005. As a result, while many builders ceased operations

completely and most--including Lee Wetherington Homes--instituted painful cutbacks, the Lee Wetherington Foundation has continued to underwrite critical community programs. "Fortunately we're seeing an uptick in home-buying interest, but even though the economy may be turning, it will take time for benefits to trickle down. We can't cut back on helping those in need," he says.

During the first three quarters of 2009, the Lee Wetherington Foundation awarded grants of \$79,000—slightly ahead of the \$108,500 total for all of 2008. Since its inception, awards by this foundation have totaled \$760,899 according to Stewart Stearns, president and CEO of the Community Foundation. "Lee Wetherington's Foundation within the Community Foundation of Sarasota County has made a significant impact on the community in many areas, from children's issues to environmental concerns, and I know personally that his generosity has not stopped with his Foundation. He also gives generously of his time to specific projects and has, from his own resources, accomplished many significant projects for the disabled and others without seeking or even expecting recognition. Lee cares deeply about all the people in our community and does everything he can to help."

Wetherington established his Foundation primarily to help those whose needs are not addressed by other governmental or charitable entities, with a focus on the less fortunate and especially on disadvantaged youth. The grants are awarded through a formal application process overseen by the Community Foundation, but Wetherington—the immediate past chair of the Community Foundation--personally reviews many requests. A bachelor with no children, he directs most of the grants to youth-related programs. He also responds to a broad range of other needs. In 2009, for example, the Foundation awarded \$4,000 to Community Affordable Supported Living so the organization could remodel a bathroom for handicapped accessibility, as well as \$8,500 to Harvest Tabernacle of Sarasota, Inc., for the purchase of a used box truck. Pastor Jim Minor of Harvest Tabernacle says his organization uses the truck to transport goods for Free Indeed, its food pantry, which feeds about 300 families each week, and for its Clothes Closet, which distributes 5,000 pounds of clothes weekly. "During these tough times, it is

essential for us to deliver food and clothing to the neediest people in the community," he says. "We are grateful for the grant that made this possible."

Also in 2009, the Lee Wetherington Foundation also contributed \$25,000 to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota County for ongoing maintenance of the Lee Wetherington Boys & Girls Club on Fruitville Road. J. Mack Reid, President/CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota County, says "I'm not sure we could have made it through this recessionary period without Lee Wetherington's continued support of the Boys & Girls Clubs. He has always been there for our kids in good time and in tough times and we appreciate his steadfast support."

Other 2009 grants went to the Wetherington Scholarship Fund (\$25,000); Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Inc., to sponsor the annual Scrub Jay 5K Race (\$10,000); United Cerebral Palsy of Sarasota-Manatee for program support (\$5,000); and the Greater Downtown Sarasota Action Team for a Circuit 12 Youth Recognition Luncheon (\$1,500). Foundation funds over the years have also gone to a number of Wetherington's favorite causes, including the Boys & Girls Clubs of both Sarasota and Manatee Counties, Forty Carrots Family Center, Salvation Army/Sarasota Chapter, All Faiths Food Bank, SCOPE and many others.

The Lee Wetherington Foundation is not the only vehicle for Wetherington's community service. Lee Wetherington, his company Lee Wetherington Homes and many Wetherington trade partners have made significant in-kind contributions as they have identified needs. Two such projects were the public-private partnership with Sarasota County and the Friends of Fruitville Public Library, resulting in the creation of the Reading Garden at Sarasota County's Fruitville Library in 2002; and construction of the Lee Wetherington Boys & Girls Club on Fruitville Road, currently celebrating its fifth anniversary. A current *pro bono* project involves updating the Roy McBean Boys & Girls Club in Newton, with completion expected by the end of the year.

To learn more about the Lee Wetherington Foundation, contact Wendy Hopkins, vice president of grants & program services, Community Foundation of Sarasota County, at 941-556-7152 or wendy@cfsarasota.org. To learn more about Lee Wetherington Homes, visit www.lwhomes.com, call 941-922-3480 or write info@lwhomes.com

About the Community Foundation:

Currently celebrating 30 years of service to caring individuals and organizations, the Community Foundation is a public charity founded in 1979 by the Southwest Florida Estate Planning Council. Made up of more than 640 funds, the Community Foundation awards grants and scholarships totaling over \$6 million annually, in the areas of arts, culture and humanities; education; civic engagement; health; human services; animal welfare and the environment. Since 1987, more than \$72 million has been awarded. Stewart Stearns is CEO and president; Jim Shedivy is Board Chair.

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