GivingMatters

Newsletter for Community Foundation of Greenville

Winter 2026

Community Foundation awards three scholarships to Bella Majarais

Since she was three, Bella Majarais, a 2025 graduate of Wade Hampton High School, has wanted to be an actor. Now she's studying for a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Performance at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, with a goal of working in TV and film.

To help fund her education, Majarais received financial aid from the university, as well as three local scholarships administered by Community Foundation of Greenville: the Greenville County Fire Chiefs' Association Scholarship, the Obermier Scholarship, and the Rama Memorial Scholarship for the Greenville City Fire Department.

The Greenville County Fire Chiefs' Association set up a scholarship fund in 1995 to promote higher education for firefighters and their spouses or children. Mary Belle Obermier established the Obermier Scholarship with a gift from her estate in 2012 to help academically deserving students. The Rama Family funded a scholarship in 2006 to promote opportunities for higher education for children of members of the Greenville City Fire Department. These are three out of the ten scholarships that CFG currently administers.

Majarais qualified for two of the scholarships through her father, a firefighter, and learned of the other when applying through CFG.

Bella is a 2025 graduate of Wade Hampton High School

Bella on campus at Belmont University

"My dad always told us there is a scholarship for kids of firefighters," she said. "Applying for scholarships is not always easy and fun, but regardless of amount, it helps bridge the gaps. Community Foundation of Greenville makes it easy to apply, with a streamlined process. You never know what's out there until you look."

Majarais, who attended the Fine Arts Center's Theatre Performance program while in high school, has enjoyed her college classes in acting, stage movement, voice, and diction.

"The acting classes are teaching the Meisner Method," Majarais said. "The professor worked in the industry, so her knowledge and coaching are fantastic."

Majarais first heard about Belmont's program when someone mentioned it during a college visit at Vanderbilt. She and her mother made a detour to check it out.

"Mom and I both fell in love," she said. "The people, the program, the neighborhood and campus life, everything about it fit so well. It felt like home."

Majarais is also enrolled in Belmont's Global Honors program, and is pursuing a double major in psychology.

Majarais advises high school students to keep an open mind when choosing a college until they find the one that feels right.

"Put yourself out there and really be yourself—that lets you stand out," she said. "Use whatever makes you uniquely talented. That will take you a lot further."

To learn more about scholarships administered by the Community Foundation of Greenville, visit cfgreenville.org/grants-impact/scholarships.

Community Foundation Welcomes New Board Members

We are grateful for their committment and excited to benefit from their expertise as we advance our mission of improving the lives of Greenville County residents through strategic philanthropy, community investment, and collaborative leadership.

Shaniece Criss

Dr. Shaniece Criss is a civic leader, public health scholar, and strategic optimist. At Furman University, she is the director of the Advocacy and Social Policy master's program and an associate professor in the Health Sciences Department. She hosts Civically Grown, a podcast where changemakers share the roots and impact of their leadership. Shaniece serves on the Travelers Rest City Council, where she founded the Youth Council Academy, a civic leadership program for local students. She is also a member of the Prisma Health Board. She previously hosted a television show in Guyana during her Peace Corps service and has held roles at the CDC, ICF International, and CNN. Shaniece earned a doctorate from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, a MPA from the Harvard Kennedy School, a MPH from Emory University, and a BA from Oglethorpe University. She has been married for more than 20 years and is a proud mom to a compassionate middle schooler.

Laird Green

Laird Green is one of six shareholders of Abacus Planning Group, a holistic financial advisory firm with offices in Greenville and Columbia. As head of the firm's Financial Planning Team, Laird coordinates the creation, research, and implementation of strategies and processes that enhance the overall wealth and success of Abacus's clients, over 250-plus families with shared assets. Laird began her career as a financial planner in 1998 and earned the CFP® designation in 2002. Prior to working at Abacus, Laird worked with Cary Beckwith at Beckwith Financial Advisors. She has served in various roles with local PTSA organizations and at Christ Church. A Greenville native, Laird holds a Master of Arts in Public History and a Master of Library and Information Science, both from the University of South Carolina, and a Bachelor of Arts in History from Furman University. Laird is married to Scott and has a daughter, Sarah. Weekends often find Laird walking in the neighborhood, reading a book, volunteering, or spending time with her family.

Kimberly Witherspoon

A native of New Zion, SC, Kimberly holds a B.A. in History and Political Science from Furman University and a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center. Previously a successful public finance attorney, Kimberly was named a South Carolina Super Lawyers Rising Star four consecutive years and was named as one of The Bond Buyer's Rising Stars. A collaborator and change agent in Greenville, Kimberly was recognized as the Greenville Chamber of Commerce's Young Professional of the Year and for her work as the first African American President of the Junior League of Greenville and past board member for the United Way of Greenville County. Kimberly is a Fellow of the 15th class of the Liberty Fellowship and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. Kimberly currently serves on the Board of the Greenville Free Medical Clinic, the USC School of Medicine Greenville Dean's Council and the Truist Community Advisory Board. She is Assistant General Counsel at Goodwill Industries International, where her work supports the Goodwill network through legal operations and compliance.

With gratitude, we recognize the volunteers who concluded their Board of Directors service in 2025:
Rick Harris, Katie Howell, and Carlos Phillips
Your commitment has made a meaningful and lasting impact on Community Foundation of Greenville and our community!

Steve Grant, Community Foundation fundholder, receives the Order of the Palmetto

Congratulations to Steve Grant on receiving South Carolina's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Palmetto! Steve is a longtime friend of the Foundation, and we are grateful for all the work he has done to advocate for and support young adults battling substance abuse, addiction, and mental illness.

In 2012, Steve founded Chris and Kelly's HOPE Foundation and established it as a field-of-interest fund at Community Foundation of Greenville. What began as a father's tribute to his sons quickly grew into an impactful organization dedicated to providing financial support to programs treating teens and young adults battling substance abuse and addiction.

Bob Morris, CFG President said, "Through his various roles and initiatives, Steve Grant has significantly impacted addiction awareness, treatment, and support in South Carolina. His efforts have undoubtedly touched countless lives affected by substance use disorders in our state."

Pictured L to R: Bob Morris, Steve Grant, and Stacey Bevill

Planned charitable giving yields year-round joy

DONOR PROFILE: MIKE AND BETH ANDREWS

For Mike and Beth Andrews, charitable giving is not something they do only around the holidays or at year's end to reap a tax benefit. They find joy in getting to know how local organizations work to strengthen their community, and they time their gifts to provide support throughout the year.

For them, giving is fun and intentional.

"Each January, we sit and review our previous year's giving and chart our course for doing more in the new year," Mike Andrews said. "We don't wait until Q4 to make giving decisions. Our goal in January is to replenish our donor-advised fund and then deplete it again."

The Andrewses make contributions from a donor-advised fund established with Community Foundation of Greenville, which helps donors support the causes they care about through convenient and tax-efficient means. CFG's history and connections with local nonprofits provide unique insight for giving with impact.

"Community Foundation has been stellar at understanding what we want to do and how to use our DAF to achieve it," Mike Andrews said. "It's been vital to our efforts to be philanthropic."

Mike and Beth love that Greenville is often featured in lists of the 10 best places to live and want to ensure that the city's charms aren't accessible only to those with privilege and resources.

"Greenville is our chosen home, and we agree that it's pretty wonderful. We want Greenville to grow to be in the '10 best' for all its citizens, so our local giving focuses on improvements that support people on the margins, especially people of color," Beth Andrews said. "Can we be among the best in ensuring everyone has opportunities for affordable housing, food security, health care and opportunities to thrive?"

To that end, they have been involved with Triune Mercy Center, a faith community that serves people living without shelter. They have invested in Greenville Housing Fund, which works to increase affordable housing for the full spectrum of needs, from families living below 50% of the area median income to those earning 100% of the AMI.

The couple donates to nonprofits that provide entrepreneurial support and adult skill enhancement, such as Mill Village Ministries' Village Launch, Soteria and Greater Good Greenville's RevUp GVL.

The couple sees themselves as cheerleaders for organizations doing innovative work in the community. "We talk to nonprofits about their plans, their successes and lessons learned and their dreams for the future," Beth Andrews said. "It is inspiring and so much fun. We are not some huge foundation, but our gifts can make an impact here in Greenville."

Triune Mercy Center

Greater Good Greenville's RevUp GVL

To learn more about donor-advised funds, visit cfgreenville.org or contact Gina Blohm, Chief Development Officer, at gblohm@cfgreenville.org or Ryan Thackray, Director of Development, at rthackray@cfgreenville.org.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2025 was a record-breaking year for Community Foundation of Greenville! Last year brought the most contributions, most distributions, and the largest number of assets the Foundation has ever seen. Last year was also the most we've ever raised for our Annual Campaign - $467,000. I want to give a special "thank you" to everyone who donated to our Annual Campaign, which allows us to respond to evolving needs and invest in the projects that make Greenville a place we are all proud to call home.

This growth allows us to continue to champion local nonprofits and their leaders through operating support, scholarships, capacity building grants, and investments in capital campaigns. An example of this is our recent support of two local efforts working to increase shelter and housing for our most vulnerable neighbors – The Salvation Army's Rebuilding Hope, Restoring Lives capital campaign and Greenville Together: A Home for All.

The Salvation Army's Rebuilding Hope, Restoring Lives capital campaign is transforming its long-standing shelter campus to expand safe, dignified space for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Greenville.

Greenville Together: A Home for All is a community-wide collaboration using best practices to rapidly move unsheltered households into permanent housing and stability.

I hope you will join us in supporting both efforts so that every neighbor has not only a safe place to sleep tonight, but a permanent place to call home.

Salvation Army

Greenville Together

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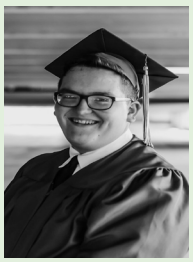
Follow us on social media for more stories and updates.

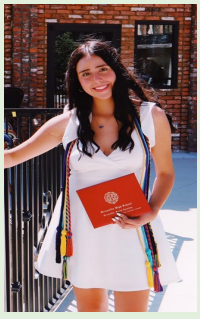
Building Brighter Futures: Scholarship Funds Support Local Students

APPLICATIONS OPEN MARCH 1, 2026

Community Foundation of Greenville administers ten different scholarship funds established by individuals, companies, and organizations wanting to assist individuals with furthering their education. Students apply to the program and, if eligible, may receive awards from one or more of the different funds:

- Alice Watkins Scholarship
- Barry and Elaine Nocks Scholarship
- Greenville County Fire Chiefs' Association Scholarship
- Greenville County Library Staff Education Fund in memory of Anthony Messineo
- John I. Smith Charities Scholarship
- Margaret and Jack Paylor Family Scholarship Fund
- Obermier Scholarship Fund in memory of John N. Obermier, Edith M. Obermier and Mary Belle Obermier
- Rama Legacy Scholarship
- Rama Memorial Scholarship Fund for the Greenville City Fire Department
- Sterling High School Alumni Association Scholarship Fund in Memory of Dwight David Huggins - **NEW!**





Visit our website to learn more about each scholarship and apply at cfgreenville.org/grants-impact/scholarships.

Introducing the Next Up Fund

Established in 2025 by Ann and Michael Chengrian, the Next Up Fund provides additional scholarship awards to deserving students who apply for financial assistance through the Foundation's annual scholarship program. This Fund provides additional awards to students whose dedication and potential merit investment, helping ensure that more learners have the opportunity and move forward with confidence. **If you are interested in establishing a fund to achieve your charitable giving goals, please visit cfgreenville.org.**

Pictured: 6 of our 47 scholarship recipients of 2025

Annual Campaign Exceeds $467,000!

We gratefully acknowledge the following donors for their contributions to the 2025 Annual Campaign.

Like small streams joining together to form something powerful, your individual gifts collectively create lasting impact across Greenville County. These contributions reflect the commitment of longtime supporters as well as those who are new to our work. Together, your generosity strengthens local nonprofits, provides timely assistance to families facing unexpected challenges, and invests in long-term solutions that help our community grow and thrive. Your support makes it possible for the Community Foundation to respond to evolving needs and invest in the projects that make Greenville a place we are all proud to call home.

Thank you for believing in the power of community and for joining us in our mission to improve the lives of Greenville County residents through strategic philanthropy, community investment, and collaborative leadership!

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The Impact of Your Gift

"The Community Foundation's investment in our strategic planning has been incredibly meaningful for Greer Relief. This is the first time we've had the resources to engage a consultant, and working with Patrick Jinks has helped our Board and leadership step back, reflect honestly on our work, and plan intentionally for the future. This support is strengthening our organization in ways that will directly benefit the neighbors we serve for years to come."
- *Caroline Robertson, Executive Director of Greer Relief*

Pictured: Caroline Robertson and the Greer Relief staff. Greer Relief exists to transform neighbors in need to neighbors who thrive by providing services to eliminate poverty and help neighbors overcome barriers for success.

This powerful reflection underscores why giving to the Community Foundation of Greenville's Annual Campaign matters. Through programs like Capacity Building Grants, your generosity provides nonprofits with the tools, expertise, and space they need to plan strategically, grow stronger, and better serve our community.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who has already given—your support is what makes stories like Greer Relief's possible, creating lasting impact for neighbors today and for years to come. To learn more about the annual campaign or to renew your support, please visit cfgreenville.org.