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For more info: Mary Harp-Jirschele  
[mharp-jirschele@jjkeller.com](mailto:mharp-jirschele@jjkeller.com)

## **Keller family giving hits \$25 million mark**

*Milestone reached with \$50,000 grant to LEAVEN*

NEENAH, WI (February 24, 2010) – When John “Jack” Keller considered how to commemorate his wife Ethel’s birthday in a unique way in 1991, he didn’t set his sights on becoming one of the Fox Valley’s true philanthropists. But \$25 million later, that’s exactly what has happened.

The \$25 million milestone was reached today with a \$50,000 grant at LEAVEN’s annual meeting. “LEAVEN epitomizes the mission of the J. J. Keller Foundation, and it was an appropriate way to mark the achievement,” said Robert (Bob) Keller, president of the foundation board. The \$50,000 gift will help LEAVEN meet its mission of assisting people in crisis whose basic needs cannot be met elsewhere.

The Keller family has distributed grants in a variety of ways since the establishment of the original Keller Foundation, Ltd. in 1991. Now known as the J. J. Keller Foundation Inc., that fund has become the major giving arm of the family since Ethel’s death in 2004 and Jack’s in 2007. In the early days of the foundation, average per-year total distributions were approximately \$50,000. More recently, up to \$2.7 million per year has been granted. Since ’91, more than \$8 million has been granted from the J. J. Keller Foundation.

Most of the \$25 million has been distributed through the John J. and Ethel D. Keller Donor Advised Fund at the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, which was established in 1994. Nearly \$17 million has been granted to community causes and concerns from that fund. Recently, the family established the J. J. Keller Foundation Donor Advised Fund at the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation, and nearly \$100,000 has been granted from that venue in two-plus years.

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Trying to single out one especially memorable grant over the years is tough, but Bob Keller notes that “we do take special pride in our relationship with the Schmidt family and its U.S. Oil Open, which annually raises more than \$1 million for poverty-related causes in the greater Fox River Valley.” As a lead partner and donor to the Basic Needs Giving Partnership, the Kellers have thus far committed more than \$2.8 million to the cause over a four-year period. Basic Needs funds are granted to and distributed through community foundations in the Fox Valley, Oshkosh and Green Bay.

The Fox Valley Children’s Mental Health Center also holds a special place in the Kellers’ hearts, as it was Ethel’s efforts that helped launch the 2004 campaign to get it off the ground. She died before she could see the first young patient walk through the door, but granddaughter Marne Keller-Krikava, also a foundation board member, picked up the torch and saw it through to fruition in 2008. “Knowing first-hand the challenges mental health issues bring, and knowing further that the affected population often is not in a position to have a strong voice, we felt we must be proactive and be the catalysts for finding a solution for our kids,” Keller-Krikava said.

Over the years, Jim Keller’s interest in sports encouraged the foundation to benefit a number of local educational systems. Most notably, J. J. Keller Field at Titan Stadium at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, the field house gym floor at Neenah High School and scoreboards at many local schools. “These improvements made a significant difference to the athletic programs at the schools,” said Jim. “We are proud to have the Keller name associated with these high-class educational systems.” Jim’s son, Brian, also a foundation board member, focuses his efforts on youth sports and programs that help kids get hooked on fishing. “Through stocking the ponds at the YMCA camp, many kids get a chance to fish who otherwise wouldn’t. There is nothing better than watching a child catch their first fish!” he said.

Marion (Mary) Murvine is the lone non-family member on the foundation board and serves as secretary. Her fondest memories involve accompanying Jack and Ethel on weekly site visits at various nonprofits. “They were very hands-on,” she said. “They wanted to see and feel the impact of their gifts. They very much enjoyed their time touring nonprofits in the community.”

As the Kellers look toward their next \$25 million in giving, they are focusing on organizations and programs that address the causes and consequences of poverty, in addition to specialty areas of interest such as mental illness. “We’re on a mission to get at the root causes of these issues and make a difference in the lives of

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individuals and in our community as a whole,” Keller-Krikava said. “We’re hopeful that our giving will inspire others to give to the level of their ability. Every dollar makes a difference – to the organizations and individuals affected and to your inner spirit. And like my grandmother always said, ‘If you don’t have a dollar, you can always give your time.’ Giving back is a wonderful feeling.”

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