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## Giving with spirit

PHILANTHROPISTS  
SARAH SCHMIDT AND  
MARNE KELLER-KRIKAVA

**SPECIAL  
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# Powerful partnership

MARNE KELLER-KRIKAVA AND SARAH SCHMIDT  
SHARE A NEED TO GIVE  
BY TERRI DOUGHERTY

To talk about Sarah Schmidt and Marne Keller-Krikava is to talk about millions of dollars, and Richard.

With donations made through family foundations, Schmidt and Keller-Krikava have made a significant impact on the bottom lines of nonprofit organizations from Green Bay to Oshkosh.

When Richard takes his place at the checkout of the Oshkosh Food Pantry every day, he's building on their gifts. The developmentally disabled volunteer, who also receives food from the pantry, works at an organization that wouldn't have come into existence without a financial nudge from Schmidt and Keller-Krikava.

The pantry that helped 1,800 families in October and feeds Richard's social needs as well as his physical ones opened its doors in April thanks in part to a grant from the Basic Needs Giving Partnership, supported by the U.S. Oil Open Fund for Basic Needs and the J. J. Keller Foundation.

"When people see they give, there's a certain amount of forward momentum that develops," says Steve Vickman, director of the Oshkosh Area Food Pantry. "They help energize the entire community."

Schmidt and Keller-Krikava, representatives for their respective family foundations, not only spearheaded a collaborative grant-making effort but are changing the way giving is done in Northeast Wisconsin.

## COMBINED EFFORT

Schmidt and Keller-Krikava began working together in 2007 to support organizations that meet basic needs and address the root causes of poverty. Through area community foundations, the J. J. Keller Foundation matches grants made by the U.S. Oil Open Fund for Basic Needs established by the Schmidt family. That amounted to more than \$1.1 million in grants from the Basic Needs Giving Partnership in 2009 and \$1 million in 2008.

"When you really get into this stuff it's sort of overwhelming how big the need is even in this little community, where people are so generous and the standard of living is pretty good," Keller-Krikava says.

Organizations receiving assistance range from dental health clinics in Green Bay to a free clinic at Mercy Medical Center in Oshkosh to the Boys' and Girls Club of the Fox Valley.

"It's been really exciting to see this partnership be created," says Eileen Connolly-Keesler, president of the Oshkosh Area

Community Foundation. "It is interesting to see foundations and companies come together to disperse money for the same needs, collaborate together. Usually corporations and everybody do their own thing."

The collaborative component does not stop with the organizations making the donations. In a pioneering step, the nonprofits receiving grants are given a financial incentive to work together. "This is the first granting program Green Bay has had where one of the major strategies has been collaboration between nonprofits," says David Pamperin, president of the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation. "Their funds have helped create a reward for nonprofits working together and bringing their core competencies to address the problems they're all concerned about."

"That's one of the really innovative parts of the Basic Needs Giving Partnership."

In Appleton, LEAVEN and the Emergency Shelter received \$60,000 in 2009 to streamline services for those at risk of homelessness. Habitat for Humanity, Goodwill and the Financial Information and Service Center teamed up to help people become financially self-sufficient enough to own their own home, and the American Red Cross began working with other organizations that help the elderly remain independent.

"Just in the couple of years since the program started, I've noticed that this fund has helped agencies think differently about what it means to work together," says Marti Hemwall, grants and community initiatives officer at the Community Foundation of the Fox Valley Region.

"Resources are limited and frequently scarce for nonprofits. It can be worrisome and feel like you're giving something up, but I've seen real changes in realizing they can both work smarter and more effectively toward their mission by working together."

In addition to cooperation, the partnership looks for results. It helps programs that can make a lasting impact on the community, not offer a temporary fix.

"Historically many charitable efforts have been directed toward the symptoms of poverty and helping those who find themselves in those circumstances," says Curt Detjen, president of the Fox Valley foundation. "[The Basic Needs Giving Partnership is] very results-driven."

"It's encouraged a very broad-based conversation among the non-profits in our region. I'd like to think it would have happened (on its own) but the reality is collaboration is very hard work, and



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Marne Keller-Krikava

given all the other challenges I'm certain it would not have progressed this far this fast."

### BACKGROUND IN GIVING

The women who initiated this innovative effort point to long-established family histories of giving that inspired them to make a difference in the community.

Schmidt recalls her grandfather's concern for others and her father telling her to get her wagon so they could fill it with food to bring to a neighbor in need.

"There was no conversation about it, we didn't have this whole big discussion about why it's really important to help people who are hurting," Schmidt says. "It made this really profound impression on all of us. His brothers did the same thing, his sisters did the same thing."

"It's just the way life was," Keller-Krikava says. "In our family those things weren't done out of obligation, that was just what you did."

Schmidt and Keller-Krikava are both connected to well-established family businesses and share a strong commitment to the communities they grew up in. Keller-Krikava went to Neenah High School, lives in Appleton and is the director of strategy and business planning at J. J. Keller and Associates in Neenah and a member of the Keller Foundation board.

Schmidt grew up just outside Kaukauna, attended Xavier High School and lives in Evanston, Ill. She has a doctorate in clinical psychology, and returns to the area a couple days a week to work with her family's foundation.

"When I started to understand what the money was doing and see the potential for what we could do, it was a very easy thing for me to get really involved," Schmidt says. "Having the family link and the history there just for me makes it more powerful."

"It also gives our families a sense of a higher purpose," Keller-Krikava says. "We really enjoy the business and watching that thrive but it adds a new dimension to our being."

Decisions about which organizations receive grants from the basic needs partnership are made through advisory committees at the three area community foundations. Representatives from Keller and U.S. Oil are on the diverse 12-person committee, as well as other community members with expertise in basic needs.

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## Power lunch

Their generous partnership began two years ago over lunch at El Azteca, when Marne Keller-Krikava made a proposal that was almost too good for Sarah Schmidt to believe.

Schmidt, director of the U.S. Oil Open and the U.S. Oil/Schmidt Family Foundation, had invited Keller-Krikava to meet to see if the Keller Foundation could increase its annual contribution to the U.S. Oil Open Fund for Basic Needs.

"My whole thought in the back of my head was that the Keller Foundation had been giving at the same level for years, and if I could get them to go from \$2,500 to \$10,000 that would be awesome," Schmidt says.

Keller-Krikava had something much bigger in mind.

"It was very serendipitous in timing," she recalls, "because at the same time we were really doing our estate planning."

When they met, Keller-Krikava's grandfather, founder of Neenah-based safety and compliance product producer J. J. Keller & Associates, had already designated that his estate

would go to the family's foundation after his death. It would continue to serve the needy in the area.

The Schmidt family had recently shifted the focus of the U.S. Oil Open funds to focus on basic needs. The U.S. Oil fund had been established in 1986 by family members who owned a Combined Locks-based petroleum and distribution business, and in 2007 became the U.S. Oil Open Fund for Basic Needs.

Keller proposed to Schmidt that the Keller Foundation team up with the U.S. Oil fund.

"Marne says, 'I'm sure we could do more as a sponsor, but maybe we could do something really great, like match your grant-making budget,'" Schmidt recalls. "I tried to play it really cool, but in the back of my mind I'm like, she can't be serious."

Keller-Krikava wasn't being facetious, and followed up with Schmidt after their lunch to go over the details.

The Kellers liked the Schmidt family's charitable model. It focuses on addressing the root causes of poverty and gives away 10 percent

of its fund balance each year, through grants facilitated by local community foundations.

"I really liked what they were doing in terms of making this a community effort," Keller-Krikava says. "We each have a seat at the table, but that's it. The decisions are being made by the community."

The collaboration got the blessing from other family members, who saw that the families' values were aligned, and the Basic Needs Giving Partnership was formed.

"It just seemed like a great fit," Keller-Krikava says. "When we got our families together it was literally a five-minute decision."

The fund gave away 1.1 million in 2009, and has given more than \$2 million since its inception.

Any concerns about a loss of identity that might develop from the partnership were overshadowed by its advantages.

"This isn't about us, this is about solving this problem," Keller-Krikava says. "Let's do it together."

Krikava says. "The needs are always greater than the resources."

To make the best use of those resources, she and Schmidt aren't quite finished making changes. Coming in 2010 is a focus on getting organizations to work together across communities.

While their collaboration has significantly changed how nonprofits deliver services in Northeast Wisconsin, the last thing Keller-Krikava and Schmidt want is for the spotlight to be on them.

And that's why their partnership succeeds.

"Their personalities mesh, their values mesh," Connolly-Keesler says. "It's not about recognition, who's doing what, but together we're doing something that makes an impact on poverty in our communities."

So in the end, a story about Schmidt and Keller-Krikava is really a story about Robert, who needed to find a place to volunteer. Vickman found a spot for him at the food pantry checkout, right next to his friend Richard.

"He only has to volunteer three hours a month, but he's here twice a week," Vickman says. "Now he can come here and give something back. Those kind of things are huge." **W**

## BECOME PART OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The Basic Needs Giving Partnership isn't an exclusive club.

The collaboration between the U.S. Oil Open Fund for Basic Needs and J. J. Keller Foundation welcomes new partners or donations of any amount. The money goes toward grants given to area nonprofits through community foundations in Oshkosh, the Fox Cities and Green Bay.

"It's really rooted in the fact that the issues are so much bigger than we are and so much bigger than we can solve on our own," says Marne Keller-Krikava, who helped establish the giving partnership.

To make a donation to the Basic Needs Giving Partnership, contact the community foundation in Oshkosh, Appleton or Green Bay or e-mail Sarah Schmidt at [sschmidt@usoil.com](mailto:sschmidt@usoil.com).

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