**Granting Smiles: Making a Difference**

A new fund at the Kearney Area Community Foundation (KACF) is helping local veterans with a challenge that some people may not think of. The Smiles for Vets Fund aims to help veterans in the area pay for much-needed dental work.

The fund was created from the estate of Carla Middleswart, a local woman who wanted to leave behind a legacy of helping veterans. “Carla’s wishes were that after all bills and beneficiaries had been paid, the rest of her estate was to go for the benefit of veterans,” says Jean Widdowson, Middleswart’s sister and executor of her estate.

The inspiration for the fund comes from experiences in Middleswart’s life. Middleswart and Widdowson’s father was a Korean War veteran and he paid for Middleswart to have some much-needed dental work done at a time she could not afford it. “When her life ended too soon, it made sense to me that her estate might do the same for her veteran friends,” Widdowson says. “With the help and input of Carla’s dentist, Smiles for Vets became a reality.”

After receiving an application, a committee will review it to see if it meets the selection criteria, then decide how much assistance they are able to give to each applicant. The dental office is able to bill the fund at KACF directly, making things as smooth as possible for the veteran receiving the grant.

**2022 Impact**

- $5.3 million Distributed to the community*
- $4.5 million Total gifts and grants received in 2022
- $197,404 Scholarships awarded*

*Includes allocations for future distribution.

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**“This is one way some of our finest heroes can receive needed dental care that might otherwise have been out of reach,”** says Widdowson. Since the fund’s creation, several area veterans have already received grants, with one recipient expressing their gratitude, saying, “I appreciate your help to veterans, such as myself, very much.”

The fund is making a difference, not only for area veterans, but for the legacy of one local woman. “Carla tried never to miss an opportunity to thank a veteran for their service,” Widdowson says. “Veterans were her great love and she appreciated their service to our country.”

Local veterans who need help paying for dental work can fill out an application for assistance. Many local veterans’ organizations have the application, but it is also available at the KACF office. To get the application or to find out more information, contact KACF by emailing andi@kearneyfoundation.org or calling (308) 237-3114.
Enriching Local Nonprofits

This spring, four nonprofit organizations were awarded a total of $20,000 in grants.

- **Buffalo County Community Partners** received $8,000 to help fund training for Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Spanish speaking individuals. The training is designed to help people experiencing a mental health challenge or in crisis.
- **Buffalo County Historical Society/Trails & Rails Museum** was granted $5,000 to help fund the event the society is holding for Kearney’s Sesquicentennial (150th) celebration.
- **Kearney Rescue Cats** was awarded $2,000 to help fund their efforts to assist mobile home neighborhoods in Kearney that are dealing with a large number of feral cats. The cats will be trapped, neutered, vaccinated and returned to their original location.
- **Two Rivers Public Health Department** received $5,000 to help fund their LifeSmiles Dental Program, which provides preventative dental screenings, education and other resources to families with children in preschools, Head Start schools and WIC clinics.

If you are interested in setting up an endowed grant to fund your charitable wishes, contact our President/CEO Judi Sicker at the KACF office at (308) 237-3114.

Want to learn about past grant recipients? Scan the QR code to see videos about each of them!

Interested in a grant from the Kearney Area Community Foundation?

The Arthur Klinkacek Community Enrichment Fund’s grant cycle is triannual with deadlines of March 1, July 1 and November 1. To view guidelines, pre-apply or find more information, please visit [www.kearneyfoundation.org/klinkaceck](http://www.kearneyfoundation.org/klinkaceck).

Building for Tomorrow applications are accepted on a bi-annual basis, with the next deadline on August 1. To view guidelines or apply, please visit [www.kearneyfoundation.org/building-for-tomorrow](http://www.kearneyfoundation.org/building-for-tomorrow).

Steps to Protect Your Information

In today’s world, it is important to take steps to protect your personal and financial information. Here are some tips you can take to prevent identity theft:

- Never share your personal or account information over the phone, through the mail or on social media unless you initiated the call and have a trusted relationship with the requester.
- Shred receipts, financial documents, account statements and other important documents after you no longer need them.
- Check your credit report regularly and report any discrepancies.
- Do not fall victim to a scam. If someone is trying to pressure you into immediate action, hang up and call a trusted person to talk the situation over. You can also call your local bank or police station to report the scam.

Interested in a grant from the Kearney Area Community Foundation? 4. Guidestar.org

In addition to monitoring your personal and financial information, you also need to be aware of fake nonprofit organizations. You want your donation to count so here are five things to do before donating to a charity.

- Search online for the cause you care about and include phrases like “best charity” or “highly rated charity”. Also, search for the charity name and include words like “compliant”, “rating” or “scam”.
- Check out the charity’s website. Does it give details about the programs you want to support or how it uses donations?
- Find out if the fundraiser and charity are registered. Each state should have a charity regulator.
- Check if the donation will be tax deductible. Confirm the organization has registered with the IRS as a tax-exempt organization. This information can be found on the IRS website.
- Use one of the following organizations to help you research the charity.
  1. BBB Wise Giving Alliance
  2. Charity Navigator
  3. CharityWatch
  4. GuideStar

Lastly, check with your local Kearney Area Community Foundation staff. They will be happy to help you determine whether the charity is legitimate or not and help you find a charity you are passionate about to donate to!