

# Together For Good



Lincoln  
Community  
FOUNDATION

SUMMER 2025



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## Greetings:

There's something about the summer that invites us to open our doors a little wider. Maybe it's the extra hours of sunlight, afternoons at the ballfield, or the chance to trade your garden zucchini for your neighbor's ripe tomatoes. Whatever the reason, this time of year offers countless moments that show how vibrant our community is when we come together.

Here at Lincoln Community Foundation, the beginning of summer is signaled by the end of Give to Lincoln. And what a day it was! This year marked my first Give to Lincoln Day as president, and as I walked through the booths at the Tower Square nonprofit festival – the energy and anticipation hit me like a wave. What a delight to watch three kiddos run across the square, begging their mother for a few dollars to support the nonprofit they discovered. Fun stuff indeed!

After the excitement of Tower Square, our team returned to the office and watched our community step up once again. As we gathered in the lobby, we hit “refresh” on GiveToLincoln.com – and celebrated



Rye and Ora Burken enjoy a game of Plinko in Tower Square.

together a new record total. There were cheers, high fives and some playful teasing of those who guessed far too low in the office pool – a team favorite.

While we celebrate the success of another Give to Lincoln Day, we know it's the generosity of donors, perseverance of nonprofits and connections with each other and our community that create ripples of good year-round. Of course, our role in linking donors to the organizations they care about extends beyond this One Big Day of Giving, allowing us to work with folks like Betsy Grindlay who champions her favorite causes through a donor advised fund. And what a joy to support nonprofits like Big Gumdrop Outdoors with their first-ever grant from LCF, helping kids in our community experience nature and the outdoors.

As the final weeks of summer give way to the transformative energy of autumn, we hope this issue of Together for Good leaves you with a renewed sense of community connection. Lincoln is truly a special place to call home – in any season.



Nonprofit representatives gather in LCF's Barbara Bartle Garden on June 26 to celebrate a record-breaking Give to Lincoln Day. Full story on Page 6.



With gratitude,

*Tracy*

Tracy Edgerton,  
President



## Garden Performance Series in full swing

Produced by Arts Inc., the beloved Garden Summer Performance Series is celebrating 51 years as a popular Downtown Lincoln tradition.

Join us every Wednesday through September 17 for free performances by local musicians from noon – 1 PM in the Barbara Bartle Garden (1415 N Street).

Up to date information on the status of performances can be found on the series' Facebook page.

### 2025 SPONSORS INCLUDE:

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## Welcome Tyrell

*We are excited to welcome Tyrell Ross to our growing team of professionals as Vice President for Finance.*

Tyrell has nearly 15 years of experience in finance, accounting and human resources – most recently with the College of Business at University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

“Tyrell brings a breadth of experience to this essential role of overseeing the Foundation’s finances,” said President Tracy Edgerton. “We are thrilled to welcome him to our team of folks who wake up every day and inspire our community to give, act and lead.”

In the role of VP for Finance, Tyrell will oversee the Foundation’s financial system, including financial management, investment monitoring, human resources and information systems. He has a Master of Business Administration from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Tyrell succeeds Scott Lawson who retired on April 30 after 15 years with LCF.



# Rise, Shine and Prosper

## *Community jumps into the next phase of its shared agenda*

By Brittany Wren

Nearly 200 Lincoln community members, leaders and advocates gathered on April 23 at Nebraska Innovation Campus to kick off the next phase of Prosper Lincoln. With breakfast and a shared purpose in hand, we launched Prosper Lincoln 3.0 – a renewed call to collective action rooted in the values of equity, connection and shared opportunity.

### A Performance to Remember

The event opened with a moving spoken word performance by Nebraska State Poet Jewel Rodgers, who challenged us all to reflect on what prosperity really means – for individuals, neighborhoods and communities.

*“Prosperity cannot be a pipe dream,” she said. “It should be a promise – a statement of self-worth and a declaration of the importance of every single life well lived.”*

Her words set the tone for a morning rooted in courage, imagination and a shared responsibility for Lincoln’s future.

### A Decade of Progress, A Future of Promise

Tracy Edgerton, president of Lincoln Community Foundation, took the stage to reflect on the journey that brought us to this moment. What began with the original Lincoln Vital Signs report has evolved into a movement for lasting, community-driven change.



Anne Brandt, executive director of Lincoln Littles, shares accomplishments from Prosper Lincoln’s Early Childhood focus area.

*“The 2014 data demonstrated some incredible strengths in our community – that’s for sure – but it also elevated some challenges that may not have been understood previously,” Tracy said. “The first three years of Prosper Lincoln demonstrated that we need folks waking up every day focused on this – tackling the challenges and lifting opportunities.”*

### Introducing the Prosper Lincoln 3.0 Focus Areas

Grounded in the newly released **2025 Lincoln Vital Signs** report and shaped by hundreds of community conversations, Prosper Lincoln 3.0 centers on three renewed focus areas:

- **Connections:** All people thrive through community engagement and social bonds. From neighborhood coalitions like Belmont’s School Neighborhood Advisory Committee to inclusive learning spaces, Prosper Lincoln will prioritize belonging, civic

engagement, economic mobility and relationship-building.

- **Housing:** All residents live in quality housing they can afford. Prosper Lincoln will support housing access, affordability and long-term stability in response to rising rents, aging housing stock and increasing demand.
- **Early Childhood:** All children are flourishing socially, emotionally, physically and educationally. Through partnerships with organizations like **Lincoln Littles**, Prosper Lincoln will continue building access to high-quality early care and a strong, supported childcare workforce.

These trends demand coordinated, people-first solutions – something Prosper Lincoln is designed to deliver.

**Stay connected:** Visit [ProsperLincoln.org](https://ProsperLincoln.org) and sign up to receive news and updates.







# From the Blog

## A SHARED AGENDA FOR LINCOLN'S FUTURE

By Tracy Edgerton

When I think about what makes Lincoln special, it's not just our vibrant neighborhoods or quality of life – it's how we show up for one another. We're a community where people ask, "How can I help?" and then roll up their sleeves to do the work. That spirit is exactly what fuels Prosper Lincoln.

More than a decade ago, Lincoln Community Foundation convened civic, nonprofit and business leaders to commission Lincoln Vital Signs, a data-driven snapshot of our city's strengths and challenges. What followed wasn't just a report – it launched a movement. From that shared understanding emerged Prosper Lincoln, a community-wide effort grounded in listening, learning and acting together.

Since then, Prosper Lincoln has united thousands of residents, organizations and businesses around common priorities – from early childhood education to housing to building strong neighborhoods. The results speak for themselves.

In Belmont, parents, families, educators, city leaders and students gather monthly to plan community events, elevate resident voices and solve problems together. That's what **Connection** looks like: neighbors coming together to create opportunities, whether it's expanding access to the local pool or planning a "Summer of Fun" shaped entirely by resident feedback.

In the newly completed Foxtail Meadows neighborhood, families are now living in safe, stable homes built through a coordinated housing initiative supported by multiple public and private organizations. It's a model for what happens when we invest in **Housing** that meets real needs.

And at Northeast Family Center, Lincoln Littles is helping families overcome the high cost of childcare while strengthening the early childhood workforce. That's the power of **Early Childhood** – when family well-being and education are supported together.

These stories remind us: change doesn't happen in silos. It happens when we align around a shared vision, pool our resources and keep showing up.

That's why we've launched Prosper Lincoln 3.0 – a renewed call to action guided by fresh insights from the 2025 Lincoln Vital Signs report and the voices of people across our city.

At Lincoln Community Foundation, our role is to convene, connect and catalyze. We don't run every program, but we invest in the infrastructure and relationships that allow good ideas to grow – and we support the people closest to the work.

As Rev. Juan Carlos Huertas, a Foundation board member and leader within the Prosper Lincoln visioning team, said: "Hope increases with imagination." We invite you to imagine a Lincoln where every child gets a strong start, every resident finds connection and every household and family has a place to call home.

That vision starts with all of us. Let's rise, shine and Prosper – together.



# Give to Lincoln Day soars to new heights

## *14th annual giving event breaks records*

The early morning rain certainly didn't dampen spirits as nonprofit representatives and LCF staff came together to celebrate another record-breaking Give to Lincoln Day.

"Year after year, Give to Lincoln Day represents what makes this community special," said President Tracy Edgerton. "Once again, Lincoln has stepped up to break records and uplift the important work of local nonprofits. This incredible display of generosity will open doors for a brighter future."

The 14th annual event on May 29 raised \$9.5 million for 502 local nonprofits – the highest amount raised in the event's history and nearly \$1M more than the year prior.

Coordinated by the Lincoln Community Foundation, Give to Lincoln Day encourages donations throughout the month of May to support the local nonprofits and causes people care about. The funds are designated to help support charitable organizations that serve Lincoln and Lancaster County.

"We heard from several organizations that they had their best year of fundraising yet," shared VP for Grantmaking and Operations, Michelle Paulk. "During a time of uncertainty for many nonprofits, these gifts represent more than just dollars – it's an important show of support."



“  
Year after year, Give to Lincoln Day represents  
what makes this community special.

– LCF President Tracy Edgerton

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All participating nonprofits also received a proportional share of a \$650,000 match fund based upon the organization's percentage of the total dollars raised, provided by LCF and sponsors including Presenting Sponsor, West Gate Bank.

More than 27,000 donations were received for the 14th annual Give to Lincoln Day. The event has raised more than \$75 million for local nonprofits in its 13-year history.

For more information and to see gifts received for each nonprofit, visit [GiveToLincoln.com](http://GiveToLincoln.com).



*Community members visit nonprofit booths during this year's Give to Lincoln Day Festival in Tower Square.*



**Interested in playing a BIG role in Lincoln's One Big Day of Giving? Contact Vice President of Development – Legacy Planning, Chip DeBuse, at 402-474-2345 or [chipd@lcf.org](mailto:chipd@lcf.org) about becoming a 2026 match fund sponsor.**



## Thank you to our 2025 match fund sponsors!

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# DONOR PROFILE

## Betsy Grindlay

Donor Advised Fund keeps family giving intentional for the Grindlays

By Justy Gortemaker

For Betsy Grindlay, giving back to her community isn't something reserved for someday – it's woven into the everyday.

"I love the feeling of our big, small town – including the unexpected run-ins in the produce aisle," she said. "There's this shared sense of responsibility to make this place better for each other."

A Lincoln native, Betsy has always felt connected to the rhythm of the Capital City. She works in marketing and operations at her family's business, Speedway Motors, but the daily routine of raising two young kids also keeps her and her husband, Jarrett, on their toes.

"We're currently in the stage of diapers, swim lessons, sidewalk chalk and sticky hands," she laughed.

As the couple juggles work, family and a freezer full of popsicles, they're also quietly building a legacy – one that's rooted in gratitude, fueled by intention and shining a light for the next generation of Lincoln givers.

The Grindlays recently took the next step in their giving journey by opening a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) at Lincoln Community Foundation.

Their decision reflects not just commitment to community but a hope to inspire others to prioritize giving as well.

Betsy's introduction to philanthropy began in a quiet but consistent way.

"Every week at church, my mom would write a check, and one of us kids got to put it in the offering bowl," she shared. "It was a visible act of giving – nothing flashy, just a steady message that this is who we are. We're a family that gives."

Now raising a family of their own, Betsy and Jarrett are focused on passing on those same values.

"We live here, we give here," Betsy said.

One of the ways they have paved their own philanthropic path is through Lincoln's One Big Day of Giving. They have supported Give to Lincoln Day for years, and Betsy admits it continues to energize her.

"It's a way to give in one unified place and the nonprofits do such a great job showcasing their unique missions and plans for each contribution," she said. "I know people who check the leaderboard and support the nonprofits near the bottom to help spread the love. It's one day where it feels like we're all working together to do something magical for our community."

One of her favorite Give to Lincoln Day traditions is "crowdsourcing" through her personal Facebook page, inviting her friends to share the nonprofits they support and why.

"Hearing someone say, 'this one helped my family,' or 'this organization supports kids in a way that's really meaningful to me' turns giving into a conversation."

And it's that spirit that ultimately inspired the couple to open a Donor Advised Fund – just in time for Give to Lincoln Day.

With the guidance of their financial advisor, Blake Anderson at Pittenger & Anderson, Betsy and Jarrett began exploring options for more intentional charitable contributions.



“Blake knew it was important to us to keep our support local, and he encouraged us to look into a DAF through LCF to make sure that happened,” she explained. “Once we realized it could help us plan in a way that was thoughtful, strategic and community-focused, it was a no-brainer.”

The process, she said, couldn’t have been easier.

“I filled out an online form and immediately got an email back from Rhonda Page at LCF that laid everything out. She even anticipated questions I might have in the future. It made me feel like, ‘Okay, I can do this.’”

One of Betsy’s biggest hopes is that more people will begin to see philanthropy as something within reach and meaningful now.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re giving \$5 or \$5,000 – it all makes a difference,” she said.

“I remind myself often that there are seasons of less and seasons of more, but it’s the consistency that matters.”

She also emphasized that giving is about the example you set.

“I want to live a legacy of giving, not just leave one,” she said. “Right now, that means teaching my daughters to share toys. Someday, I hope that grows into a mindset of generosity and empathy that they carry with them into adulthood.”

Betsy is already thinking about the long-term impact their fund can have.

“There’s something powerful in thinking about your legacy while you’re still building your life,” she said. “We don’t know what the future holds, but we can still plan to make a difference in it.”

The Grindlays’ story is a reminder that philanthropy isn’t about waiting for perfection; it’s about participation.

“To anyone thinking about opening a DAF – just start,” she said. “It’s easier than you think, it feels better than you expect and it matters more than you’ll ever know.”

“  
We live here, we give here.  
”

– Betsy Grindlay

## Simplify Your Giving

A Donor Advised Fund (DAF) is a popular and convenient tool that simplifies annual giving and recordkeeping. This type of fund helps you control the timing of gifts because you may take the tax deduction when you make a gift to your fund. Then you can recommend charitable donations whenever you wish, whether it’s monthly, annually or any time in the future.

DAFs at LCF help folks accomplish their charitable goals in Lincoln and beyond, offering flexible giving options with top-notch personal assistance and expertise.

Charitable giving should be fulfilling, inspiring and fun – and that is possible when you work with a team who knows your name and keeps your philanthropic passions at the heart of everything we do.

Ready to learn more about a Donor Advised Fund at LCF?  
Contact Susan Crotteau at 402-474-2345 or [susanc@lcf.org](mailto:susanc@lcf.org).



# Reeling in smiles

*Big Gumdrop Outdoors connects underserved youth to nature with help from their first-ever grant*

**By Mary Kay Roth**



*Kyro Winston proudly holds a sunfish he caught on the shore of Holmes Lake.*

Growing up in Lincoln, Elijah Riley always loved the outdoors. A self-taught young man in archery and hunting – you could often find him going fishing with his dad, camping with his family and building fires in Cub Scouts.

But he soon noticed other kids like him – underserved minority children – were not experiencing nature and felt uncomfortable or afraid outdoors.

So, while only in his early 20s, with his own sweat and money, Elijah was on a mission to create Big Gumdrop Outdoors – a nonprofit with a focus on helping underserved children discover the wonder of Mother Nature.

"I believe the outdoors is for everyone, and it's my mission to make sure no kid feels like they don't belong," he said. "The wild is waiting – all we have to do is step outside."

Until recently Elijah provided the funding for his endeavor, but last year Big Gumdrop Outdoors received their very first chance for outside support – an Open Door Grant from the Lincoln Community Foundation.

"It was for \$3,000 and that was just huge for us," said Elijah. "We are so grateful to the Foundation for not only supporting us, but for providing opportunities to all of Lincoln's nonprofits and smaller organizations.

We're now able to go into summer, our busiest season, confident we're making a difference for our youth."

Today, Big Gumdrop Outdoors operates after-school clubs, summer programs and monthly community events designed to meet kids where they are. And Elijah envisions so much more, fostering a generation of outdoor enthusiasts that are diverse, empowered and deeply connected to the land.

"We are driven by an urgent reality," he said. "Too many children are growing up disconnected from nature with serious implications for their health, development and futures."

Elijah explained that today's children play more on concrete than dirt. Youth ages eight to 18 spend an average of 7.5 hours a day on screens, a staggering 114 days per year. Research indicates that such overreliance on digital devices is linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety, inadequate sleep, low self-esteem, poor body image, eating disorders and online harassment.

"Put those kids in nature," Elijah said with a huge smile. "You'll see transformation."

"There's joy on their faces when they experience the excitement of catching their first fish and embracing the outdoors."



Elijah found his solace in nature starting at a very young age with dad time and Cub Scouts.

“As I got older, I watched History and Discovery channels, wildlife shows, hunting documentaries and adventure series. I wanted to grow up and hunt alligators,” he said.

He took a detour in high school when he played football at Lincoln High, but three knee surgeries sidelined the teenager and brought him straight back to the outdoors – eventually starting a social media presence to document his nature experiences.

During a semester abroad in college, he gave a presentation about his fledging business to his entrepreneurship class.

“One of my peers challenged me,” said Elijah. “She asked, ‘If your goal is to teach underserved youth about the outdoors, what are you actually doing to give them access?’”

A lightbulb went on – his mission was solid.

Upon his arrival back to the states, Elijah immediately began real-world networking, creating lesson plans and, in the summer of 2023, Big Gumdrop launched its first eight-week program with the Clyde Malone Community Center.

“I designed the curriculum all by myself. I wanted kids to learn about ecosystems, put up tents, fish and cook over campfires,” he said.

He taught them about corn production (corn stalks to corn-on-the-cob to corn in the can) – planting pumpkin seeds, matching animals with appropriate ecosystems and identifying wildlife calls.

Midway through college, Elijah was officially the founder and executive director of Big Gumdrop Outdoors, a nonprofit dedicated to educating urban youth about nature.

Growing in bits and pieces, the organization now offers after-school programs through the Lincoln Public Schools Community Learning Centers, as well as several summer programs.

And the list of lessons and activities has broadened as well, now serving up everything from conservation storytelling (with lessons in photography and videography), to building campfires and cooking hot dogs, to getting coached in the lures, baits, rods and reels of fishing and experiencing area parks and lakes through field trips.

In December 2024, Elijah graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and was hired by Ducks Unlimited as a Youth Engagement Coordinator for the Great Plains region.

But his focus remains on teaching essential wilderness skills that inspire the next generation to explore the outdoors and consider careers in natural resources.

And he continues to stretch his scope.

Big Gumdrop has branched out to hosting monthly community events such as nature walks in Wilderness Park, fishing and kayaking clinics and more.

Last year he looked to provide ongoing support for Big Gumdrop by engaging in fundraisers, as well as submitting their first grant application to Lincoln Community Foundation.

“Receiving the grant from LCF moved our bottom line,” he said. “I can’t begin to describe the affirmation this has given us. We are grateful for all the people who have offered support, and we’re excited to think about what long-term sustainability can look like.”

Of course, he dreams even bigger – hoping to take the Gumdrop formula beyond Lincoln – to Omaha, Kearney and places throughout Nebraska.

“Our goal is to create a pipeline where we begin working with children in elementary school, move to their feeder middle school and work with them again in their high schools,” he shared. “The high school students could serve as mentors to the younger kids, and we could provide internships and scholarship opportunities to develop deeper connections to the outside world.”

Elijah believes he’s had good fortune in his life, starting with a less-than-flattering nickname in school – Gumdrop – and turning it into something positive.

“It seems like all the stars have aligned and I am feeling quite blessed,” he said.

He remembers when he was a boy, and a Cub Scout leader taught him how to build a fire.

“He changed my life, yet he never really realized the impact he had on me,” he said. “Now I watch all these kids out in nature, learning new skills – and I wonder how we will change their lives.”

## Celebrating generosity and leadership

*LCF honors Harbor of Dreams Foundation and Ava Thomas at annual event*

More than 250 community members gathered in early May at the Nebraska Innovation Campus Conference Center for Lincoln Community Foundation's annual donor recognition event. The program featured two awards that celebrate extraordinary displays of generosity and leadership.

The Harbor of Dreams Foundation was honored with the Charity Award and the JoAnn Martin Civic Leadership Award recognized the leadership and community service of Ava Thomas.

The Charity Award was established by LCF to provide the community with an opportunity to recognize transformational acts of generosity. The quiet and steady philanthropy from the Harbor of Dreams Foundation has provided foundational support for early childhood, affordable housing, the arts and much more. Harbor of Dreams was established in 2016 by Mike and Karen Hays and their daughter, Ashley Rinaker.

"We first connected with the Hays family and Harbor of Dreams over our shared commitment and passion for

ensuring that every child has access to quality care their family can afford," said President Tracy Edgerton. "We are so grateful for the safe harbors their generosity has created in our community."

The JoAnn Martin Civic Leadership Award recognizes a strong commitment to the community. The award was established and first presented to JoAnn Martin shortly before her passing in the fall of 2021 by a group of community leaders including individuals from Ameritas and NRC Health, who also created an endowment at the Foundation to sustain JoAnn's legacy.

Ava Thomas is the president of the Lincoln Journal Star and senior regional VP of sales, Midwest for Lee Enterprises. She established the Inspire – Celebrating Women Leadership Awards in 2015 to shine a spotlight on the incredible contributions of women in our community. Ava is a founding member of 100s of Women Who Care and has served in a leadership



*Ava Thomas (center) greets attendees during the May 7th luncheon.*

capacity for many nonprofit and civic organizations.

"I am humbled to receive an award that bears the name of JoAnn Martin, whose legacy continues to uplift women in business and community leadership through the JoAnn Martin Leadership Legacy Fund," shared Ava. "I want to sincerely thank the Lincoln Community Foundation and the selection committee for this honor."

"I've been incredibly fortunate to have people who invested in me – who gave, guided and believed in me," she continued. "From mentors in our community to my extraordinary friends and family, I am beyond grateful. It's why giving back matters so deeply to me. It's not about recognition; it's about honoring those who paved the way and paying it forward for others."

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Visit [facebook.com/LincolnCommunityFoundation/video](https://facebook.com/LincolnCommunityFoundation/video) to watch inspiring tributes to this year's recipients.