



JESSIE BALL
DUPONT
FUND

Some argue that the first years of the 21st century have jolted Americans out of complacency – but not for the reasons millennialists predicted. Rather than Y2K computer glitches suddenly halting businesses and services, the economic downturn and recession that historically follow boom periods have caused the current distress. We read again of reduced spending, corporate layoffs and business closings. It appears that the events of September 11 have diverted some of our attention and much of our public funds to the causes of domestic security and a war against terrorism. The needs of our people, however, continue to cry out for attention. Health, education and general welfare might seem less urgent at a time when FBI “high alerts” distract us from their gravity, but in our hearts we know that our greatest defense lies in making investments in our people.

We at the Jessie Ball duPont Fund are somewhat fortunate in our restriction to serve a specific list of eligible institutions. We are committed to supporting the organizations Mrs. duPont designated, which causes us to think deeply about how we might help these organizations strengthen the communities in which they are embedded.

We often receive modest requests from these organizations for grants that will help see them through the quagmire of cutbacks and freezes, and the intense competition for funding created by an overstressed system. They ask for relatively small amounts of money to help them serve the needs of the homeless and hungry, the children of parents who must work to survive, the broken and divided communities that struggle with race and class issues, and the mentally and physically disabled, to name a few.

Our communication with these organizations reminds us where the rubber hits the road. It reminds us that modest support of the organizations and institutions that continue to tend to the needs that existed before September 11 (and that will coexist with them long into the future) can make a difference. In the midst of talk about millions and billions of dollars, we are humbled that our smaller grants of \$25,000, \$10,000, even \$5,000 – when strategically invested – can offer good organizations an opportunity to sustain their work and operations, to develop and thrive in the future and to improve the lives and prospects of their constituents.

If our smaller grants can make such a difference, think of the impact the philanthropic community as a whole might have. This thought must have inspired Paul Ylvisaker, the influential scholar and philanthropist, when he wrote:

There is vast potential in small-scale philanthropy, and this is a time when that potential needs to be fully released. The dollars held by small foundations, individually and collectively, are a precious resource in a society trying to meet burgeoning needs with the increasingly scarce public funds. Moreover...the creative use of foundation moneys rather than their size and scale constitutes the real potential of philanthropy – 'small can be effective.'

Thinking about “the real potential of philanthropy” and the effects that small, thoughtful grants can have on the lives of individuals, neighborhoods, communities and society, we present this issue of Notes From the Field, entitled Great Little Grants. Herein, we feature five recent grants, or series of grants, of less than \$25,000 that have had and will continue to have more impact than their dollar value. Therefore, we say “great” not in a congratulatory or self-congratulatory way, but as an oxymoron to the word “little” – to underscore that the returns have far outweighed the investments.

These grants represent only a sampling of the “small grants” the Fund has awarded in recent years. However, they are indicative of the outcomes many of our small grants have produced. And they have taught us a number of lessons about the effectiveness of modest grantmaking and the good practices it can enable organizations to espouse:

Small grants can offer nonprofits much-needed opportunities for organizational learning and self-reflection.

In economically strapped times, many nonprofit boards and staffs find they lack the time, resources or energy to reflect critically upon their organization’s past, present and future. They feel overwhelmed by increases in the demand for their services, the competition for funding and the amount of work they must accomplish with fewer staff and resources. Yet, such reflection can mean the difference between the stagnant organization that falters under adversity and the dynamic organization that can adapt and thrive in the face of change. Time for shared learning and reflection enhances problem solving, stimulates creativity and can build internal commitment of the staff and board to the mission of the organization.

Small grants can help organizations establish new relationships and networks in the community, step outside traditional boundaries and, as Harvard Business School Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter says, “dance with different partners.”

Many organizations dread the thought of changing the way they do business because it means entering into unfamiliar and sometimes risky realms. While there is safety in the familiar, it also can compromise organizational effectiveness and creativity. Sometimes, organizations can find themselves questioning whether they are offering services that align with the needs of their clientele, whether their client base needs to be expanded, and whether they are making the most of their resources. The answers to these questions can require organizations to look to new client bases, partners and resource providers to increase their effectiveness.

Small grants can be used to leverage additional investments, both by lending credibility to an organization and by supporting the organization’s development of a sound business plan.

Almost like getting a first job, it can be tough for nonprofits to interest funders in their ideas for growth. By making small grants that require matching funds from other funders or sources, foundations can provide nonprofits with a vote of confidence that may positively influence the decisions of other funding sources. Small feasibility grant studies also give organizations the time and resources to prepare sound, well-researched proposals that are more likely to be funded.

Small grants can prepare an organization for internal changes that come with growth and development.

Sometimes an organization has a vision for future growth, but it needs to help staff move with it toward that vision. Confusion and apprehension about new ways of doing business can create concern among staff and can lead to their reluctance to change. Small grants can afford organizations the time and resources to plan – with staff – for change, to make educational opportunities available to staff, or to purchase new materials or equipment that may make the transition smoother.

Small grants can provide organizations the seed capital they need to “practice” new work and, in so doing, to gain new perspectives on their work and the potential of such work for the public.

Some nonprofits exist on a shoestring budget simply to fulfill the very specific mission for which they were founded. Their members and boards remain content as long as that mission is being fulfilled. Others reach a point where they want to do more and be more. But having little or no budget can preclude them from taking action.

The stories and lessons in this issue overlap, and there are, of course, other lessons to distill from them. But most of them have to do with the diverse roles philanthropy can play for nonprofits – the roles of sounding board, advocate, broker of relationships and ideas, investor, to name only a few.

We hope the stories of these great little grants will inspire nonprofits to think more broadly about the kinds of support and advice they can seek from funders, and that it will inspire funders to think more broadly about the kinds of partnerships they can forge with the nonprofit community. Finally, we hope this issue convinces all readers of the truth in that wonderful line – that small really can be effective.

This issue of Notes From the Field was conceived and written by Tracy Constantine, and edited by Mary Kress Littlepage. We are indebted to them for their dedication and commitment to this work.



Sherry P. Magill
President



PORT ST. JOE GARDEN CLUB

PORT ST. JOE, FLORIDA

MISSION: *To gain and impart information on gardening, agriculture and horticulture for the beautification and education of the community.*

GRANTS: \$ 5,000 June 1995
 \$ 10,000 November 1997
 \$ 5,000 December 2001

In the delightful children's book *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart, a young, rural girl who has been taught the skills and pleasures of gardening by her grandmother takes those gifts with her to the city when, in 1935, her father loses his job and she must live with her uncle. The girl, Lydia Grace, manages to beautify her uncle's bakery and apartment building (and indeed his life), planting seeds, bulbs and baby plants, mailed from her grandmother, in every flower box, cracked teacup and dented bakery pan she can find. When she is able to return home a year later, she bequeaths her gardens and plants to one of her uncle's employees, whom she taught to garden during her stay. Of her impending return, Lydia Grace writes to her grandmother: "I can't wait to help you in your garden again. We gardeners never retire."

And so it was in 1995 with the Port St. Joe Garden Club. The group of 15 white women – only four of whom were under age 65 – in the Panhandle city of Port St. Joe, Florida, decided

to share their knowledge of gardening with elementary school children and their families. Concerned that gardening was becoming a lost art among younger generations, the garden club approached the Jessie Ball duPont Fund for a small grant of \$5,000 to support three community gardening workshops and the establishment of a Junior Gardening Program for fifth graders at Port St. Joe Elementary School.

The school's principal offered the club the use of a plot on the property. Members then worked with fifth-grade teachers and students to till the land, prepare the soil and plant radishes, strawberries, potatoes, corn, cabbage, tomatoes, squash and peas. They also drew upon the knowledge and resources of Roy Lee Carter of the Gulf County Cooperative Extension Service, who helped the students learn to operate a Rototiller, assess what plants would grow best in the area, and care for the plants and garden. The garden club members made weekly visits and worked with teachers at the school to help with garden maintenance.

After five months of effort, the students harvested a cornucopia of vegetables and each student proudly took home a bag of new potatoes he or she had helped nurture.

“The children were absolutely beside themselves with excitement during this project,” says Betty



Students' work in the garden yields broad smiles of satisfaction - and lots of vegetables.

Lewis, a former president of the Port St. Joe Garden Club. “They loved watching the progress and seeing what they could do. And the results even surprised the Garden Club!”

In addition to regular work with fifth-graders, the Garden Club hosted three community horticulture workshops on the grafting of fruit trees, landscape maintenance and food production. Area residents were invited to attend these free, hands-on workshops, conducted by local fruit crop specialists and horticulturists, and to take a grafted tree home with them for planting.

The project not only educated children and adults in the community about horticulture, it encouraged citizens to engage in common, shared work across lines of race, class and age in a community with a long history of division. Club member Bunny Miller, former president and chair of the Children’s Garden Committee, recalls of her work with children and adults: “Out there in the garden there is no disability, no color, no differences. They are all just children...and friends ... working together.”

The success of the community gardening projects prompted the Port St. Joe Garden Club to continue its work with the community. In 1997, the club received \$10,000 from the Fund to expand the horticulture workshops and junior gardeners programs and enhance the grounds around their garden club building. Members had raised the funds to improve the physical structure and interior of the building, a former Catholic Church, creating a place the community could use for receptions, meetings or retreats. Part of the Fund’s grant would enable them to “spruce up” the grounds and create a bird sanctuary, adding to an inviting atmosphere.

From this work on the grounds grew a program called Port St. Joe Pride. Garden club members teamed up with business owners and city commissioners to create a “Colors of the Season” program that lent consistency to the landscaping of all the downtown areas. Each season, the garden club would choose certain colors and flowers that would suit the weather and plant

them on their own grounds. Then business owners and commissioners would attend a coffee event at the garden club to see the season's plantings. With some financial assistance from the city commission, business owners would plant the same flowers and colors in their window boxes and planters, creating a unified look across town.

"The palette started at the Garden Club and ran all the way through town," says current garden club president, Zebe Schmitt. "It made such a significant difference in the way our town looked – and the way it was perceived."

Slowly but surely, the little grants and projects the garden club undertook gave them a new vision of what they could be.

"The women of the Garden Club were so unassuming about their projects," recalls Sally Douglass, the duPont Fund senior program officer who has worked with them since the first grant. "But we could see that they were actually accomplishing something much greater than increasing awareness and knowledge about gardening. They were doing a remarkable job of bringing people together from a small, racially divided community to work side by side with school children and to develop a community garden. And now they were creating and beautifying common space. They were doing community and economic development."

The 1997 grant also enabled the garden club to expand the Port St. Joe Elementary School

project to include additional students, including some with disabilities. Each class was assigned several rows of the garden for planting, and the fifth-graders continued to oversee much of the tending of the garden, including weeding, composting, fertilizing and watering.

In the fall of 1999, the junior gardening project operated around the theme "From the Garden to the Kitchen," with an emphasis on the kinds of produce familiar to children. In January 2000, the project caught the attention of the local newspaper, which reported that some of the participating children, having seen only the end result at the grocery store, were learning for the first time about how vegetables are planted in the ground and harvested.

The students shared the fruits of their garden each year, cooking their homegrown treasures with the help of their garden club "assistants." Last year, they made a feast of broccoli casserole, turnip and mustard greens, collard greens and cornbread (along with a baked ham provided by their teacher) to celebrate their hard work and tenacity.

The relationships and lessons that emerged from the "practice" of developing the junior gardening and community horticulture projects led the garden club to envision a new role for itself in the community. In the fall of 2001, the club presented a more ambitious proposal to the duPont Fund.

“We began to conceptualize the potential for an expansion of the children’s vegetable garden to include a bird and butterfly garden and possibly an expanded curriculum to be offered in all other Port St. Joe schools,” wrote Schmitt. “We began to believe there could be tremendous value in inclusive community gardens available to and



Whether hoeing or harvesting, the students learned the values of teamwork and persistence.

shared by all of Port St. Joe. Finally, the club wanted to address the environmental challenges to protect, preserve and present our lovely seacoast town, develop jobs, educational opportunities and new career options to our young people. All of these challenges might be met with the development of a Horticulture Center.”

The garden club obtained a \$5,000 feasibility grant from the duPont Fund and a matching grant from the Northwest

Florida/Arvida Foundation, to identify and pursue community partners to help decide what the Horticulture Center would include. The feasibility study will allow club members to engage the services of a consultant, Audubon International, to help map out a strategy for the Horticulture Center. Through community meetings among garden club members, community stakeholders

and a panel of community development experts, Audubon will create a plan using horticulture and eco-tourism as a catalyst for sustainable community growth. Much of 2002 will be spent identifying partners, planning, conducting meetings and developing a proposal for next steps.

The garden club’s vision for such a Horticulture Center is multifaceted. The Center, with a director, a horticulturist and six to eight staff members, might develop age-appropriate curriculum in horticulture, ecology and conservation for area schools. It could help establish youth gardens in every school and offer internships and work/study programs for students in Florida colleges. The Center could provide exposure and hands-on job skill training for the expanding landscape industry in the western Florida area, as well as continuing education programs, courses and workshops for the entire community. Its greenhouse could produce plants to be sold throughout the city – especially drought-resistant plants and those indigenous to the area to help preserve endangered species. In addition, the Center could produce sod, establish community gardens, encourage composting and recycling, sponsor day camps for children, coordinate an Adopt-A-Park program and sponsor an art center for courses and workshops that teach art using natural materials.

The series of grants received by the garden club demonstrates how a relatively small amount of funding can enable an organization to sort out its identity within a community. Schmitt recalls going through club archives when she became president

and finding a copy of a \$2,500 check signed by Jessie Ball duPont herself to help purchase the garden club.

“That small grant bought and preserved an historic building and supported the development of an amazing garden club that brings people together and is studying the feasibility of participating in a community Horticulture Center! Talk about great little grants – I think we’ve had an incredible history of them.”

Today, the club has more than 50 members, ages 25 to 95. The color and gender barriers have been broken, both in club-sponsored events and membership (a men’s auxiliary supports the club). As the garden club prepares to work with the greater community to determine the feasibility of the Horticulture Center, it is obvious that from tiny seeds, some very big ideas have blossomed.

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