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Dare un futuro alle opportunità

PROMUOVERE IL DONO: RUOLO E PROSPETTIVE
DELLA FILANTROPIA COMUNITARIA

Involving and transforming the community

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Introduction/Overview

I am honored to be here in Milano with all of you and I want to thank the Cariplo Foundation and Bernardino Casadei for inviting me to this celebration and conference.

I am the President and CEO of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation located in the western part of the state of Michigan in the United States. We distribute more than \$7,500,000 (U.S.) a year to nonprofits (NGOs) in our area and have financial assets of \$215,000,000 (U.S.). Because of the generosity of the people in West Michigan, we like to think that Grand Rapids is il centro della filantropia!

While this may seem amusing, there actually is a Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University which is based in Grand Rapids. The Center has an excellent reputation in the United States providing training for nonprofit leaders while growing in stature in terms of research and formal education in philanthropy. The Grand Rapids Community Foundation and the University formed a unique partnership creating the Community Research Institute seven years ago. I will refer to this Institute in a moment because it is essential in our ability to make the community more aware of important issues.

There are approximately 800,000 people who live in the geographic area that the Foundation serves and it is considered the fastest growing area in the state of Michigan. Our local economy is doing well in comparison to the conditions in other parts of the state. We truly are the world leaders in the production of office furniture and have developed other businesses that are focusing on technology and what we call the "knowledge based" industries including the life sciences requiring great skill, research and education.

The state of Michigan, which has a population of 10 million people, is experiencing a substantial loss of manufacturing jobs due in part to the decline of the automobile industry. It has been estimated that more than 200,000 jobs have been eliminated since the year 2000.

Detroit, which is 225 km to the east of Grand Rapids, has been known as an automotive giant in the world and many businesses in our state are directly linked to this industry. The economic conditions in our state do have an impact on the dollars we raise in our communities.

Reading reports from Bernardino on the progress of the community foundations in the Lombardy region is exciting. You are all to be commended and I congratulate you all on your success so far.

I had the pleasure of working with Emilio Amigoni the Executive Director of the Lecco Community Foundation in the summer of 2000 through an exchange program sponsored and funded by the C.S. Mott Foundation, the German Marshall Fund and the King Baudouin Foundation. I am very grateful that the Transatlantic Community Foundation Program was in existence at that time as it did provide a wonderful opportunity to learn more about community philanthropy between the United States and Europe. People in Lecco were clearly quite proud that the Lecco Community Foundation was created and there was great interest by the local newspapers, associations, community leaders and citizens of the province. After seeing the results thus far, I am sure that the citizens of Lecco are very pleased with their community foundation.

After six years, it is tremendous to see that there are now 15 community foundations in the region that are growing and providing needed funding for projects in their respective communities. I understand that there are approximately 20 community foundations in total throughout Italy. Thank you Cariplo Foundation and to the generous communities of the Lombardy Region!

What I am going to talk about today is how all of you and your foundations can involve people from your community to create a culture of giving. This means that the community foundations take a leadership role to show people examples of how good programs in your community can really improve the lives of people. People need to see what is happening in your community and all of you are in the right place to be able to do that! You are creating a culture of giving.

I would like to show you how the Grand Rapids Community Foundation connects with people in our area providing a greater understanding of community issues and how we have helped create a culture of giving in our area. I will provide some practical applications and examples around these two issues which will begin to answer the following questions:

- ◆ How can community foundations become the heart of your communities and how can you play an important role in creating and growing a giving community?

- ◆ What are some ways to involve your community in the life of your foundation and how do you communicate the needs in your community to all people?
- ◆ Ultimately why is this so important for the community foundation and your community?

The Community Foundation is the heart of your community

Understanding Community Needs

Community Foundations can play significant roles in their communities in addition to funding programs and projects. *The first thing is to understand the needs and the issues in your community.* How can this be done? One simple way is to keep up on all the news! Other ideas are:

- Read all the newspapers, talk to people - your board members, your friends, your family - what is on their mind? What do people view as the top issues in your community?
- Contact and partner with universities who can help by identifying and reviewing data on your communities and share this information with your foundation. As I mentioned before, we have a partnership with our local university creating the Community Research Institute which helps us with information relating to the impact of our grant distributions and statistical information on the social and human conditions in our area. They provide demographic information on the trends in our area. The Institute has been in existence for eight (8) years and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation has provided more than \$1 million (U.S.) to finance this effort and will continue to do so in the future.
- Convene nonprofits/NGOs in your community and ask them what they think are the most critical needs.
- Ask your government officials what they believe are the most important needs and what role do they think that the community foundations could play?
- Has there ever been a research study done on the cities and towns throughout the Lombardy Region? Is that something that all of your foundations could do together?

You want to know what the quality of life is for the children, youth, and families in your communities. What are the basic needs that people have like being able to afford good housing,

nutrition and food - essentially basic needs? What is the crime level, educational achievement of the youth in your area, and how can you reach out to make people more aware of the needs?

Communicating Community Needs

Communicating the needs in your area can help demonstrate how your community foundation plays a critical role in addressing these issues. Further, you need to try to generate interest in your communities to involve people in addressing the issues.

I have some ideas that may be of interest to you. You may already be doing some of these things or maybe some of these things will seem strange as they may not fit your culture. But that is the point of having the opportunity to have all of us together from all around the world - to share and understand how we can learn from one another. You may want to consider:

- Creating information sheets that can be distributed at meetings you convene and at individual meetings with donors or potential donors.
- Write a weekly or monthly article for your local newspaper on topics of interest that you have learned from the results of your grants. What has happened because of the funding?
- You all produce beautiful annual reports and websites. I am so impressed by the design and beauty of the reports and websites. Your publications and websites do provide a way for your communities to understand what the foundation can do to contribute to the lives of people.
- Your websites should have information on issues and inform people about what is happening in your community. It is the front door to your community foundation.
- Other ideas -
 - **A blog** - I write a blog on the Grand Rapids Community Foundation website. Recent articles include the issue of improving the quality of education in our public schools; the importance of community philanthropy; Warren Buffett's unprecedented gift to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; this visit to the Cariplo Foundation and the growth of community foundations in your Region.
 - **A radio program** - I have a monthly program called "Perspectives on Philanthropy". This has been a good way of communicating what we think are the important issues and needs in our community including the economic conditions of the area, housing needs, the rate of poverty, child abuse and neglect and many

other topics. I talk about what the community foundation is doing in partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, foundations, and the government to address the needs.

Bringing people together to address the issues

Your community foundations have the ability to bring people together to discuss issues that may have a positive impact on the quality of life in your area. You can host a meeting and ask what the foundation can do to help.

As an example, in 1992 the Grand Rapids Community Foundation hosted such a meeting at a time when we needed to bring attention to key issues facing our community. We asked them to tell us what the foundation should be addressing and they told us that protecting children and youth was the most important issue in the community.

After hosting that forum, we asked 35 people to commit to a weekly meeting and formed a committee to discuss more in-depth over a nine month period of time. We conducted research, brought in experts and talked to many citizens concerned about the issue. We issued a report on the alarming incidence of child abuse in our community including 16 recommendations for immediate action.

The Grand Rapids Community Foundation has been funding a variety of programs to help families since that time to attempt to prevent abuse and neglect of our community's children. We have been very vocal with government officials and others to change the way we work with families and protect our children. We will continue to work on this and we are committed to this issue.

We brought a difficult issue to the attention of the community and addressed it and demonstrated good leadership. So I encourage you to host meetings to talk about community issues.

Over the past 16 years, we have continued to bring people together around issues relating to improving our educational system, developing ways to help older adults with health, housing, and other major issues, and other ways to keep our community strong into the future.

Developing Resources

Doing all of this does require raising funds and working with donors and interested people to become more involved. You really do need to focus on raising all types of resources: human capital, financial resources, information on needs and be knowledgeable on needs and opportunities. As has been noted in previous presentations, you are developing trust with your community.

How to Involve Your Community - Other Ideas

- Community Tours - Conducting tours showing donors and others those agencies and programs of interest that the foundation has funded. These tours can include more in-depth information on the critical needs in your community. This has given us the opportunity to talk to our donors and other people interested in the learning more about community issues as well as to demonstrate our knowledge.
- Involving community people on foundation committees who may not be members of your boards of directors. This will involve more people who will become aware of the community foundation. Once people are involved, they become more interested in the community foundation.
- Social Venture Investors - Throughout the United States, many community foundations involve groups of donors who are generally between the ages of 30 to 50 years old who do grantmaking as a team. They donate money to a fund and then participate in making grant distribution to programs in the community. Participating in this activity helps them to become more engaged with the foundation and with the community.
- Youth Grant Committee - The W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided funding to community foundations in Michigan to grow resources and to create committees of young people who could learn about philanthropy through making grants to nonprofits. Community Foundations throughout Michigan have created committees of high school students who come together to learn more about their communities and make funding decisions and distributions to programs. This is a good way to help young people understand what is going on in their community and play a significant role. The C.S. Mott Foundation also funded this effort and has been a significant funder of community foundations not only in Michigan, but throughout the world.

- Helping families who are interested in giving back to their communities and the community foundation can provide specialized services. We provide services to a number of families who are trying to involve the future generations in their family in giving back to their communities.
- Hosting forums - seminars on issues in your community which I discussed previously.
- Celebrations are important! You need to bring the good news of successful efforts to your community and host occasional celebrations to bring people in and learn more about your programs.
- Communicating information about your community in an interesting way through occasional briefing papers, brochures, websites and other methods which help create a culture of giving and caring.
- The Grand Rapids Community Foundation publishes a summary version of our annual report in our local newspaper; we present grant checks at the board of directors meetings of nonprofit organizations we have funded involving our board members; we host speakers at local service clubs bringing issues and information to various audiences in partnership with that service organization.

This is important for the community foundation and your community.

The ideas presented today may help in the development of a culture of giving in your communities. You all have been so successful and you can continue to grow if people know more about needs and how they can help. Developing partnerships with other nonprofit organization can strengthen the message out to your communities. Your community foundation will be seen as a good partner and strong leader. The results will be a more involved community who care about giving back and helping one another.

Community Foundations in Italy will continue to grow and distribute needed money to nonprofits. The next step will be involving the community in understanding the issues and helps bring awareness to the needs.

Congratulations on your success and I looked forward to your future and observing your progress. I learn so much from all of you and I appreciate this opportunity to be with all of you. Please remember that community foundations are here - For Good! For Ever!