

## Eck Family Fund looks to the future

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When John Eck Sr. and his family received a "thank-you" note at Thanksgiving last year, they were the ones who felt truly grateful.

"One of our son's friends runs a charitable entity in southern Illinois; he was telling us about these low-income areas and how he started a mentor program for some of the kids. After considerable discussions, we ended up deciding to give a grant to them from our fund at the Community Foundation," Eck recalled. "The thank-you letter he wrote back and to hear how much it meant to those kids — that's the gratification."

Eck and his wife, Linda, created the Eck Family Fund with the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln in 2004 to cultivate a giving mindset within their family, which includes four adult children, and to support the needs of causes important to them.

Eck served on the board of the Sangamon County Foundation before it became the Sangamon County Community Foundation in 2002 (later changing its name to the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln.) Assets that began at around \$800,000 have now grown to more than \$27 million, with over \$1.6 million given through grants and scholarships in 2016 alone.

"I've always been on boards and looking where I can help in the community," Eck said. "When the Community Foundation started in 2002, most of the board members at that time started some of the first funds. We set ours up to formalize our children's involvement in our family giving."

"The deal was that we would fund it for a couple of years, and then ask the kids to contribute something each year. The amount isn't important — it's the habit of giving back. Now all four are pretty charitable and involved in the fund."

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Eck said the family strives to find causes that appeal to each member who is contributing and choosing grant recipients. Eck removes himself from the grant selection process, leaving donation decisions to his wife and children. Typically, the family is drawn to charities that focus on children's issues such as health care, food security and education.

"Several years ago, I was involved with raising money for St. Patrick (Catholic School) to keep the school open, and our family decided to give a grant to the school," Eck said.

The Eck family hopes to someday involve Eck's 12 grandchildren within their family fund in addition to his four kids — Christine Lust, John Eck Jr., Thomas Eck and Paula Clifton.

"The real effort here is to try to set a tone for kids to give," he said. "And hopefully, by being part of the Community Foundation's list of funds, it encourages other people to do the same thing."

Eck has been impressed with the operations and management at the Community Foundation, and the family plans to continue contributing each year to their fund so that they are able to assist causes they care about in tangible, financial ways.

"In the end, we don't have any concrete goals for the fund other than to continue making contributions to take care of critical needs as they arise. If we make enough grants to exhaust the funds we have, great. We'll rebuild it in a couple of years. If it just continues to build up, that's OK too, because we'll eventually come across an outstanding cause that gets our attention and ultimately a grant from the Eck Family Fund," Eck said. "We've sure been lucky. If you sit and think about how fortunate you are for even a minute, you want to do something to assist those who have legitimate pressing needs."

*— For more information about establishing a fund at the Community Foundation, visit [CFLL.org](http://CFLL.org) or contact 789-4431 or [info@CFLL.org](mailto:info@CFLL.org)*