

WINTER 2026

Friends of FAO

Quarterly



Happy Valentine's Day, Friends!

Love is in the air every day at FAO and across our region.

Because, at its heart, philanthropy is love of humankind – a belief that we all have a role to play in the well-being of others. At FAO, we partner with individuals like you to turn that love into action. Filling essential needs. Opening doors to life-changing opportunities. And sometimes most importantly, reminding those who benefit from your generosity that there are people who believe in and love them. That's what you make possible every day.

Author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote that **love is looking outward together in the same direction**. When love unites us in purpose and service, the power of philanthropy transcends measurement. It's building the future we want to create together.

Every issue of this newsletter is a celebration of the impact of your philanthropy, your compassion and our togetherness in action.

On Valentine's Day and every day, our hearts are filled with gratitude for your generous giving – thank you!

In service to a **F**lourishing **A**ppalachian **O**hio,



Cara Dingus Brook

Cara Dingus Brook
President and CEO



With gratitude and love

"I am incredibly grateful to receive a scholarship that not only invests in my future but also honors individuals who have made a lasting impact on our region."

Your generosity means more than you may realize. These are just a few messages of gratitude we've received from young people whose lives this community has touched. Read about what they are thanking you for inside.

 Thank you!



A DAY OF GIVING, GRATITUDE AND INSPIRATION

On Giving Tuesday, we joined those who share our commitment to a flourishing Appalachian Ohio to celebrate what bold gifts of time, talent and treasure are making possible for the people and communities of our region.

Our virtual celebration included the presentation of two awards, recognizing a growing movement that is filling freezers – and hearts – across Appalachian Ohio and a family whose philanthropy spans business, communities and generations.

The Brooks Family – Our 2025 Chaddock Philanthropists of the Year

When brothers William “Bill” Brooks and F.M. “Mike” Brooks launched what is known today as Rocky Brands, they began a family tradition of generosity in service to community that now spans four generations.

Together, Mike Brooks, the third generation of the family to run the business, and his wife, Pam, have modeled what it means to invest in people and place – from spearheading beautification and revitalization projects in Mike’s hometown of Nelsonville to establishing a fund to benefit Pam’s native Hocking County. Their son, Jason, and his wife, Kristi, are carrying forward that legacy, supporting local schools, leading community initiatives and inspiring others to give.

THE BROOKS FAMILY



Fill the Freezer – Our 2025 Changemaker of the Year

It all started in 2021 with a simple question: What if those who support local 4-H and FFA youth by buying the pigs they raise and then sell at the county fair’s livestock sale donated those purchases to fill the freezers of local food pantries?

Five years later, Fill the Freezer is feeding our friends and neighbors in seven counties served by FAO affiliate foundation partners (Perry, Hocking, Gallia, Vinton, Harrison, Lawrence and Morgan). To date, these campaigns have provided a combined 92,000 pounds of fresh, local protein – vital nourishment that is among the most expensive grocery items for both households and the food pantries that assist them.

In 2025 alone



to feed those who need it most.



Check out our Giving Tuesday video playlist, featuring tributes to our award recipients, the full recording of our celebration and more!
www.tinyurl.com/FAO-GivingTuesday-2025

Encouraging and empowering big dreams

Education builds knowledge. Aspiration gives that knowledge direction. And when combined, they open doors to futures once unimaginable.

Last fall, we partnered with three of our affiliate foundations and the Ohio University Performing Arts and Concert Series to bring the award-winning Janet's Planet science education program into our schools to inspire elementary students to see themselves as future space explorers, scientists and innovators. Over the summer, we partnered with seven of our affiliate foundations, local employers and COSI to bring hands-on STEM experiences to middle and early high school students to increase their awareness of local career pathways.

These education-meets-aspiration opportunities reached nearly 2,000 children in 2025. And all these experiences were fueled by donor support. Together, we're giving our children new ways to explore their interests, discover their strengths and see pathways to future success while empowering them to believe they can be – and do – anything.



Blasting off with stomp rockets!



Shooting for the stars with Janet Ivey



Touching down with lunar landers



Ignite your curiosity!

See the wonder and joy these opportunities brought to the children of Appalachian Ohio.

www.tinyurl.com/COSI-JP-25

Over the next 25 years, an estimated \$124 trillion will be passed down nationwide from one generation to the next.

In planning for the future of you and your loved ones, we hope you'll also consider a planned gift to ensure the communities, causes and organizations you care about most receive your support beyond your lifetime. For information on how FAO can help you establish a bequest or other planned gift, visit www.AppalachianOhio.org/create-a-legacy or contact Holly Shelton at:



hshelton@fao.org



740.753.1111



A record year for affiliate grantmaking

Job readiness and senior digital literacy programs. Classroom learning tools. Public safety equipment. New opportunities to experience the arts. And so much more.

That's what donors to our affiliate foundations' endowment funds make possible for communities across our region every year. Their collective generosity combined with the power of endowment resulted in **a nearly 44 percent increase in affiliate grantmaking last year**, setting a new record for this annual funding.

Gifts to endowment funds are invested, with earnings from those dollars returned to our communities each year through grants to nonprofits, schools and public organizations serving our neighbors. As each fund grows, so does its impact.

FAO partners with 15 affiliate foundations to grow charitable giving in communities with some of the greatest needs and fewest philanthropic resources – because we know that strong foundations are essential to flourishing people and communities.

To learn more about our affiliate foundation partners, visit www.AppalachianOhio.org/Affiliates.

... and scholarship support

We kicked off the year with the opening of our 2026 scholarship season, joining with those who have created or given to our scholarship funds to support the educational and career goals of students across the region.

Since 2004, our scholarship program has grown to more than 320 funds, which have awarded more than 5,500 scholarships. Last year, scholarship support for Appalachian Ohio students reached an all-time high.

Scholarship totals
in 2025



\$752K+
awarded



663
scholarships

"Beyond easing financial burdens, your support served as a constant source of encouragement and motivation."

2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Growing Home Fellowship spotlight

With the support of donors, we launched our Growing Home Fellowship in 2023 to recruit and prepare the next generation of community leaders across our region.

Through this five-year pilot, 100+ early-career educators are expanding their leadership beyond the classroom – from serving dozens of local nonprofit and civic organizations to spearheading service projects.

This is just one of their stories:



As a board member of the Friends of Scioto Brush Creek, Charli Montavon leads fundraising and conservation efforts that helped the southern Ohio waterway earn its designation as Ohio's 17th State Scenic River – a recognition officially signed into effect at a November ceremony with Gov. Mike DeWine.



Stay up to date on the many ways our Growing Home Fellows are giving boldly in service to their communities

www.AppalachianOhio.org/GrowingHome

You're invited!

Learn about FAO events and opportunities for grant, fellowship and scholarship funding.



www.AppalachianOhio.org/Events