FALL 2026

Friends of FAO Quarterly

Dear Friends,

Jackie Wayne, a Growing Home Fellow from Perry County and ACE scholarship recipient (see page 2), recently shared these words with us – but they're really a message of gratitude to you. Because without you, there is no FAO.

"My Growing Home Fellowship has opened so many new possibilities for me. I never saw myself as a leader, and now I know I'm truly contributing my leadership to make my community a better place. On top of that, FAO has made the opportunity to earn my PhD happen for me now. It makes me realize how much of a difference philanthropy can make in the lives of others, and it leaves me inspired to do all I can to give back."

In this newsletter, you'll see just a few examples of your impact – from investing in community leadership and growing a sustainable approach to addressing hunger to nurturing hope and flourishing across our region.

Thank you for believing in the people, places and possibilities of Appalachian Ohio. Whether you give, partner, lead, volunteer or champion the work of others, you are essential to our shared mission.

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

Cara Dingus Brook
President and CEO

Celebrating our newest *Child of Appalachia* honoree

Our *Child of Appalachia* award honors individuals whose stories demonstrate the unlimited potential within the people of Appalachia.

This spring, we celebrated our 23rd honoree, Jackson County native Thomas B. Evans, an experienced investment professional who has been shaping the future of higher education for decades. As co-founder of American College of Education, he has expanded access to flexible, affordable online degree programs for working professionals worldwide.

Through Tom's story, we see how an entrepreneurial vision is benefiting tens of thousands of learners – and it all began here in Appalachian Ohio.

Watch the Child of Appalachia presentation Tom delivered to our Growing Home Fellows:

www.tinyurl.com/FAO-TomEvans26

A new investment in Appalachian Ohio's Growing Home Fellows

Through the Growing Home Fellowship, FAO has invested in more than 100 emerging leaders who have chosen to grow their lives and careers in Appalachian Ohio.

With the support of our donors, fellows receive financial support, leadership coaching, access to a powerful network of peers who share their commitment to their communities – and now a new scholarship opportunity.

Earlier this year, 15 fellows were awarded full scholarships to pursue advanced degrees, thanks to an anonymous gift to FAO and a new partnership with American College of Education (ACE).

Five of the recipients are pursuing doctorates. Ten are enrolled in master's level programs. All are earning their degrees from the comfort of the communities they call home and through ACE, a fully accredited online college co-founded by Jackson County native Tom Evans.

Read about these fellows who are strengthening their skills and advancing their careers and service to our region.

www.tinyurl.com/GHF-ACE2026

The Growing Home Fellowship is featured in a new national report from the Trust for Civic Life and Johns Hopkins University. The fellowship illustrates a key finding in the report and something we've witnessed across the region: When people step into leadership, they develop the sense of agency essential to flourishing communities.

Explore the report and see the Growing Home Fellowship feature on page 18:

www.tinyurl.com/TFCL-Report26

Pictured (from left) are Guy Land, FAO leadership coach; pitch competition judges John Carey, director of the Governor's Office of Appalachia, and Teri Geiger, FAO board chair; Growing Home Fellows Jessie Bennett (with newborn Heidi), Abbie Mowen, Isaac Floyd, Katie Wolfe and Lauren Craig; and FAO Board Chair Emeritus Ron Strickmaker, who also served as a judge.

Making a pitch for their communities

Our spring 2026 Growing Home Fellowship gathering brought together fellows, speakers and guests for a day of strengthening communication skills and exploring leadership strategies for community and economic development.

A highlight of these biannual gatherings is the pitch competition, where fellows present funding requests tied to their service and answer questions from a panel of judges. The following fellows stepped boldly to the stage, shared their vision and secured funding for their communities:

Jessie Bennett, Perry County
Received funding to purchase a playground structure that is the centerpiece of a new toddler play area at the Ludowici Community Foundation Park

Lauren Craig, Monroe County
Received funding to establish the Ashlynn Gonzalez Creative Legacy Fund that will support students in vocational programs

Isaac Floyd, Lawrence County
Received funding for 30 students to attend the 2026 Bobcat Academy, a weeklong summer educational program, at no cost to their families

Abbie Mowen, Scioto County
Received funding to install six blessing boxes in Lucasville that will be stocked with free books and dry goods for community members

Katie Wolfe, Washington County
Received funding to cover the expenses of the produce market at the 2026 GoPacks Community Resource Fair

A big FAO thank-you to Kristi Tanner, chief marketing and engagement officer at The O.H.I.O. Fund and FAO board vice chair, who delivered the keynote on communication and community development, and Dr. Jennifer Gwilym from the Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, who shared advice on building lives grounded in purpose and well-being.

$100,000 investment accelerates local hunger-relief innovations

Communities across our region are uniting around a shared goal: filling freezers to fight hunger. And they're doing it with additional support.

The NiSource Charitable Foundation and Columbia Gas of Ohio awarded FAO a Columbia Promise Fund grant, committing a total of $100,000 over two years to support Fill the Freezer campaigns that leverage livestock sales at county fairs into a powerful tool for addressing food insecurity.

www.tinyurl.com/FAO-FTF26

Read about this new investment that is helping to expand Fill the Freezer and explore innovative strategies to grow the program's impact and sustainability.

Fill the Freezer has delivered 130,000+ pounds of meat – and counting!

Monroe County Community Foundation committee members and supporters celebrate at their inaugural Fill the Freezer event, where buyers donated 25 hogs and four cows, providing 4,650 pounds of fresh, local protein to fill the freezers of the county's food pantries and fight hunger – one pound at a time.

Supporting our libraries as community builders

As we celebrate America's 250th anniversary, we're reminded of the roles we all play in building communities where everyone can flourish.

In honor of the vital role they serve as civic hubs, we're partnering with the Trust for Civic Life to invest $250,000 in our region's public libraries to support programs that bring people together to forge connections, address challenges and deepen their civic engagement.

Applications for this grant opportunity closed in October. Stay tuned to "meet" the recipients – and thank you to the Trust for Civic Life for collaborating with us and our libraries to strengthen our civic health.

Scan here to learn more or visit:
www.AppalachianOhio.org/Libraries

An unprecedented opportunity for our region

Our nation is embarking on the largest intergenerational wealth transfer in history, with trillions of dollars expected to change hands over the next two decades.

We partnered with Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service to explore what this could mean for our communities and found that an estimated $154 billion will be passed down from one generation to the next in Appalachian Ohio.

Just imagine what would be possible if each of us left even a small percentage of our resources to the communities and causes we hold dear.

If you are considering leaving a charitable gift in your will or estate plan, FAO can help you explore your options. Visit our webpage or contact Holly Shelton to learn more.

www.AppalachianOhio.org/create-a-legacy

740.753.1111

hshelton@ffao.org

Sharing and spreading the science of hope

As FAO continues to partner with teachers, school districts and grantees who serve our region's youth to incorporate the science of hope in their work, we're also sharing with and learning from others who are applying hope science to increase individual and community well-being. Earlier this year, Cara and Melissa Newman, Ed.D., of Press Forward Blue Grass, presented on hope science at the Appalachian Funders Network's annual gathering. Cara is also speaking about hope science at Philanthropy Ohio's annual conference.

Help write the next chapter

Everything in this newsletter tells a larger story about what happens when people share a passion, act with purpose and imagine what's possible.

You are our partners in possibility. As individuals and as a community of givers, you are helping to fill urgent needs, opening doors to new opportunities, and creating the conditions for people, families and communities to flourish.

We invite you to help shape what comes next with a year-end gift to the Flourishing Appalachian Ohio Fund. Your gift will drive innovation across our region, strengthening community leadership, encouraging high aspirations, empowering strong local foundations, removing barriers and expanding opportunities across our Pillars of Prosperity.

Together, we can write the next chapter of Appalachian Ohio's story – one defined by possibility and flourishing.

Please use the enclosed envelope, visit **www.AppalachianOhio.org/Flourishing** or scan the QR code to make your gift today. Gifts of all sizes and kinds – cash, stock, real estate, royalties and qualified charitable distributions from IRAs – are tax-deductible and make a big and lasting difference.

You are the fuel for all we are able to do for the people and communities of Appalachian Ohio – and we are forever grateful.

The reports are out. The impact is inspiring.

Every page of our annual reports tells the story of this community of givers creating opportunities, solving problems, nurturing hope and advancing flourishing across our region.

Check out FAO's 2025 annual report

And join us in celebrating the impact of our region's donors and doers.

www.AppalachianOhio.org/Annual-Reports

Explore our 2025 affiliate foundation annual reports

And see how generosity is moving our communities forward.

www.AppalachianOhio.org/Affiliates

These reports aren't just a look back. They're a reminder of what's possible when we work together. Thank you for being a part of it.

You're invited!
Learn about FAO events and funding opportunities.

www.AppalachianOhio.org/Events