

As I See It

## A legacy of compassion in action

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Today we are running a race none of us would ever have imagined or chosen. One where the finish line is desperately hoped for but can't yet be seen. We're in a race we didn't train for or expect. It's surreal and seismic. The speed and scope of the novel coronavirus crisis has posed extraordinary challenges and disruption globally, nationally, statewide and in our own communities.

Since the life-threatening onset of COVID-19, some have faced steeper hills to climb than ever before. Many have missed milestones, like graduations and weddings, or have suffered the loss of a job or worse, the loss of a loved one. Make no mistake, these pandemic days have wrought hardship and at times, outright suffering, particularly for those who are the most marginalized in our communities. At Delaplaine Foundation, our work in grant funding support has proven even more critical than ever in providing life-line support to our nonprofit partners who have been tireless in their doubled-down work of delivering critical services to those in need.

From the onset of COVID-19, Delaplaine Foundation has understood the urgency of the circumstances and has acted upon that urgency through our "response—ability" by issuing community emergency relief funding. Over the past five months, we have awarded \$539,000 to the Frederick County community through 70 grants to community nonprofits and we've been proud to align with other local philanthropic funders in the COVID-19 Collaborative that has to date put over \$1.7 million in grant funds into our community. We've seen new issues come about that require a new navigation as we are living through a public health crisis, an economic downturn, and social justice and civil rights equity concerns that have come upon our community. Alongside other committed Frederick philanthropic funders, we are assessing the availability of resources to help equitably connect need with supply as we acknowledge these crises are a weight we all share. We are all interconnected in doing our part to support one

another.

All of us are living an abrupt turnabout to what we knew as normalcy. There is daily uncertainty, yet uncertainty has always been part of being human.

Allow me to pull back the curtain on Frederick County to 125 years ago. In February 1895 an arctic cold front driven by hurricane-force winds thrust Frederick County into the longest and deepest freeze ever recorded. As researched by writer Matthew Robb, residents in Frederick County saw the overnight mercury drop to -10 degrees Fahrenheit (-23 Celsius), while highs in Frederick "struggled" to reach 10 F. Deep snow blocked city streets while stores in Frederick closed and stay closed, meaning poor families grew colder and hungrier. The winter of 1894-1895 had been exceptionally cold, but conditions reached a crisis point. It was then that William T. Delaplaine, owner and publisher of The News, ran "call to action" articles. William T. was the grandfather of Delaplaine Foundation founder and chairman George B. Delaplaine Jr. whose long-standing generosity to this community is rivaled only by his love for it. Members of the Delaplaine family fourth and fifth generations serve on the Foundation Board today.

In 1895, a newspaper story, headlined "An Appeal for Charity," drew attention to families in need in Frederick "suffering" from lack of food to eat or coal to heat their homes. Another article announced "a fund for the relief of the destitute," and reported that donations could be dropped off at the newspaper's offices on North Market Street. The response then, much as we see today, was a heart-warming story of neighbors helping neighbors, and of an entire community coming together to protect its most vulnerable citizens with remarkable leadership from young, impassioned William T. Delaplaine committing himself to serve his community.

As provisions poured into his newspaper office, he made repeated food runs through the snow-clogged streets of Frederick, bringing food, coal, and hope to families huddled in their homes. Unfortunately, in 1895, before automobiles or trucks existed, he likely made deliveries on foot or by horse and sleigh, exposing him to the elements for hours on end in the bitter cold. A few days later, pneumonia set in and a week later, on Feb. 19, 1895, he died at the age of 35, leaving behind a wife and four young children, having given his life in the service of others.

We at Delaplaine Foundation, Inc. are keenly connected to that legacy of humanitarian spirit and service that keeps us ever mindful of the needs of others.

Fast forward to the pandemic days of 2020.

We know that in Frederick County, history is being made daily by heroic acts and services rendered by courageous front-line and health care workers, first responders and others. Likewise, Frederick city and county leadership and its nonprofit community epitomize hope and resiliency. No group of individuals is more committed to respecting the dignity inherent in every life than our nonprofit partners. The opportunities to witness their true grit despite a public health crisis that demands social distancing, are as close as we are to our neighbors.

On that long-awaited day when we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, there will be much debate around remote and flexible working and organizational design and of leaders that helped organizations not only survive but thrive in periods of change and disruption. We are proud to stand alongside so many who have exhibited relentless service to navigate the uncertainties of this pandemic and find creative solutions towards new norms for a stronger Frederick County.

May we each be rallied by a personal call to action for how we might lend support in this time of uncertainty. No act of kindness or help is too small. At Delaplaine Foundation, we give thanks to being part of a long line of generational humanitarian values in action. We understand that as time passes, so do torches. We hope history will find us to have been faithful torchbearers of caring compassion and purposeful action in rendering our resources for the inclusive enrichment of communities and lives for a greater good.

*Marlene B. Young is president of the Delaplaine Foundation, Inc.*