

Our Founder

To Gil Homstad who, when President of the Black River Falls Rotary Club in 1985, proposed that the Club consider establishing a Community Foundation to assist with community needs and projects.

"Through the Black River Falls Rotary Club, Gil Homstad was the catalyst in getting the Black River Falls Area Foundation started. He has been the Foundation's Chairman since its beginning, and he has given generously to the Foundation in time and money. The Foundation has made a significant difference in the Black River Falls area's non-profits, in great part, to the the leadership of Gil Homstad."

-DAVID HOFFMAN

Ann Homstad

A Bird's-Eye View

One of our earliest family memories of Dad's community giving efforts came in the form of a parrot named Fair Share. The bird was the dubious reward for the person raising the most money for Madison's United Way Community Chest in 19xx. Dad was the winner. I'm sure as kids we were both thrilled and a bit terrified by our exotic new pet. Mom was probably terrified too—at the prospect of years of parrot care coming her way.

Some (including Al Lahmayer) might say Fair Share was proof that no good deed goes unpunished.

Fortunately, that did not deter Dad from a lifetime of strategizing, fundraising, and giving personally to enrich the causes and places he cares about, the dearest of which is Black River, the hometown to which he and our mother Alice returned in 1972.

As Gil's kids and grandkids, we can say wholeheartedly that we have learned so much from him. Without parroting platitudes (sorry, couldn't resist), here are some of those lessons:

- People give to people
- Lead by your own actions
- Every community has problems and opportunities.
- When using a car, you have to figure in insurance, depreciation and regular servicing, not just the cost of gas. When creating a community asset—a trail, a building, a pool— you're going to need a maintenance fund.

We're so proud of Dad. And we're proud to be from Black River. We love to have friends visit and show off the wonderful amenities that this community of generous and committed individuals has made possible. Black River is a beautiful place with both opportunities and problems that will rest in the hands of coming generations. Fortunately for all of us, we've had good examples to follow.

And Fair Share's destiny? Mercifully for our mother, a colleague soon heard Dad had this parrot on his hands and offered to take her for his (more) eager family. We kids escaped emotionally

unscarred from this sudden removal. Guess you can say that all's well that ends well when you give your Fair Share.

Gil's Family

Joining Forces to help Animals

The Jackson County Humane Society (JCHS) had struggled for many years to raise money for a new shelter. On May 24, 2017, officers of JCHS made a presentation to Foundation Trustees. Trustees agreed there was definitely a need for a new Animal Shelter building. In December of 2017, recognizing a major fund-raising campaign would be needed, Foundation Trustees offered their assistance to the humane society. My husband, Brad Dobbs, joined the JCHS and worked with their members on preparation for a new facility and I acted as liaison between JCHS and the Foundation.

Fundraising for the Jackson County Animal Shelter's new building was a joint effort between the Black River Area Foundation, the Lunda Charitable Trust, Jackson County, the JCHS, and members of the community. This project was unique in scope and concept because the Foundation was aiding fundraising efforts for a building to be owned by the County, with utility contributions by the City of Black River Falls, and animal welfare support from the JCHS. This dynamic challenged traditional fundraising strategies.

Gil was instrumental in his guidance to develop an approach to bring the aforementioned entities together to outline roles and responsibilities for each entity. By identifying each organizations' roles, the Foundation was able to move forward with fundraising; ultimately contributing an \$100,000 grant, \$88,000 in private donations through the Foundation's fundraising channels, and an additional \$12,000 grant to bring the total to \$200,000 contributed by the Foundation to the project.

The success of this fundraising effort has afforded our community a safe place for the abandoned and stray animals of Jackson County to comfortably stay while waiting to be permanently rehomed.

Ashley Ahl & Brad Dobbs

Boosting the Economy

To recognize the achievements and importance of Gil Homstad to the City, it is appropriate to recognize the late Tom Mills who convinced Gil to relocate from Madison to Black River Falls. Tom was a huge supporter of the area and worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for its residents.

Although Gil was mentor to me at City Hall for 30 some years his most important role for the City may have been with the Industrial Park Commission.

In 1978 when the Jackson County Iron Company operation was winding down, the City adopted ordinance #484 creating the Industrial Park Commission. Then Mayor Lou Perry appointed Gil, Mike Anderson, Orv Casper, Jerome Bjerke and Tom Mills to the Commission. Mike was always the chairman but Gil did the bulk of the work.

To show the dedication of this group they met every two weeks for several years. There were several "learning opportunities" until the City attracted LEESON Electric Motors in 1988. With Gil's leadership the City was able to present a financing package as 1 of 84 locations to do so. The City made the first cut down to 20. Then Gil with minimal assistance put another proposal together. Made the cut to 4 locations. Another proposal, this one a little fancier, was made in person at the LEESON headquarters in Grafton, WI. Chairman Mike was able to get the Dairyland Power plane to fly the City contingent to Grafton.

As always, Gil led the presentation. Success! Gil also led the proposals for LEESON'S two expansions. The Land O'Lakes story is basically the same. Neither would have happened without Gil's knowledge and leadership. Nelson Industries also relocated in the Industrial Park with the assistance of the Industrial Park Commission. These industries employ hundreds of local citizens on a daily basis and have contributed several hundred million dollars of wages and other expenses into the local economy. Gil Homstad, with a little help from his friends made the City and surrounding area a pretty nice place to live.

Bill Arndt City Administrator (Retired)
City of Black River Falls

Addendum:

In December of 2010 a new Donor Advised fund called the Incubator Economic Development Fund was created within the Foundation with a beginning balance of \$80,000. River Front purchased the Incubator building and the directors of the building donated the proceeds from the sale of the building to the Foundation. Interest income was directed to be used for community project grants. The principal may be used to for start-up loans to other prospective businesses.

At the January 8, 2013 Board of Trustee's meeting, Gil reported that the final payment of \$83,334.34 was received from Riverfront fully satisfying the \$250,000 sale of the Incubator Building. Since the sale was complete, Mike Anderson closed out the Incubator Checking and Savings Accounts. \$10,699.63 was added to the Incubator Economic Development Fund, bringing the balance to \$281,549.33.

Since that time, this fund has provided \$85,173 toward annual community grants, and \$50,000 toward community projects promoting tourism. The balance of \$198,025 continues to provide earnings used annually for grant distribution.

Julie Murray
Black River Falls Area Foundation

Lessons Learned

During my years of service as a Foundation Trustee, I have gained a vast amount of philanthropic knowledge. My lessons have been numerous and thought provoking. A philanthropist is one who aspires to make a true impact upon the world and community in which one lives. A philanthropist needs to be someone with the intelligence to be able to recognize the problems that the community needs to address, such as financial and social constraints relating to hunger or education, recreational family activities, or a host of other issues. It is important for philanthropists to possess the analytical skills to see the world and their own community for what it is and to study and discuss the solutions necessary to make it

a better place to live. Also, I have learned to practice good stewardship and growth of donors' funds.

I have first-hand knowledge in how to approach potential donors for larger donations having been on the receiving end of various conversations. Yes, Gil, I was taking notes!

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the definition of philanthropy – the love of humankind. I have always admired Gil for his compassion for those folks less fortunate. I've been truly blessed to have been a member of the Board of Trustees with Gil as Chairman for over a decade. His empathy and tender heartedness motivate people to go out of their way to relieve the misfortunes of others.

I thank you Gil, fellow Foundation Officers and Trustees, for the honor and privilege to have served under your leadership and to continue as Board Chairman. I thank you for all of the knowledge and wisdom which you have shared. On behalf of all Trustees, we will follow in your footsteps and continue "To enhance the quality of life in the Black River Falls Area, working to realize that goal with the support of individuals, families, businesses and organizations that share this commitment." Be assured the BRF Area Foundation will remain dedicated to your vision and mission.

Kay Finch

The Foundation Trail Project

If You Build It, They Will Come

Foundation Trustees began discussing a long-range plan for the construction of a multi-purpose trail parallel with the Black River. In May of 1994 Jerry Kitowski and David Hoffman worked with officials to add a continuation to the new dike for a multi-purpose trail. The following year, with 50/50 funding from the Foundation and Lunda Charitable Trust the two ramps to the river and the small park between the dike and river were blacktopped. Brushing and grading of a river walk with tables and benches between the dike and Pine View Nursing Home was completed. In 1996, Foundation Trustees authorized the Trail Committee (consisting of Jerry Kitowski, David Hoffman and Dennis Richards) to research the possibility of building a bridge across Stickney Creek, and investigate the availability of possible grant funds. Work began with the city to identify access points and trail connections. 1997 brought approval from Jackson County for the trail to cross county land. Will advisors for the Perry Hull Trust donated funds to blacktop this portion of the trail. Later that year, the first section of the trail from River Grove Apartments to Pine View Nursing Home was completed.

The Foundation Trail Committee began working on the second phase of the project in 1998. This portion of the trail would link the first section to the High School and Athletic Fields, Lunda Community Park and Hoffman Aquatic Center, Skyline Golf Course, Town Creek, Field of Honor Park and the Chamber of Commerce. The City of BRF agreed to be the project's public sponsor for the remainder of the trail. Jerry Kitowski wrote an application to the State of Wisconsin, Department of Transportation for grant monies available from the Transportation

Enhancement Fund. His efforts resulted in a grant award of \$600,000 for the project. Total project cost was estimated at \$830,000. The Lunda Charitable Trust committed \$150,000. The community contributed the remaining balance from individual donors. Throughout 1999 plans were made and the exact location layout was completed.

Construction of the second section of trail began in 2000, and the project was complete that same year. After six years a lofty goal, that began as a vision, was realized. The 4.1 mile Foundation Trail has two underpasses, a bridge, lights, benches, beautiful scenery and access to several parks. A dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony was held on September 16 at the new trailhead located adjacent to the Chamber of Commerce office building. Following the ceremony, people joined in a Grand Opening Walk on the trail to the Lunda Community Park shelter for a brat and hot dog picnic lunch.

Between 2004 and 2008, Trustees followed Gil's advice and organized annual Foundation Trail Walks to raise monies for the Trail Maintenance Fund. Today there is over \$35,000 in this maintenance fund which continues to accumulate investment earnings.

Calming the Storm

In our lifetime we meet many people, but most do not have a lasting impact on our personal lives let alone our communities. Working with Gil on the Foundation both as a previous Trustee and as Chairman of the Foundation Trail project, I assure you that he is one of those unique individuals who has made that type of impact! Gil could always be counted on to provide valuable information and support for any issues that would arise while we attempted to establish the specifics for forming the Foundation Trail. Gil's calm demeanor was something I found reassuring whenever problems arose. The dedication, commitment, and hard work he exhibited when working on projects for our community were to be admired. I consider it an honor to have been able to work with Gil and feel the positive impacts he has made to this community are immeasurable! I can only hope my words convey the utmost respect I have for Gil and his many, many accomplishments.

Dr. Jerry Kitowski, Chairman
Foundation Trail Committee

Moving FORE ward?

In 2014, Gil asked to meet with Fred Stai, Buz Hoefer and myself. Due to negative financial results over the past several years, concern was expressed over Skyline's future. Skyline is a significant asset to the City and County. It brings revenue into our area, and even more importantly, it provides residents with a source for recreation and dining. In addition, it provides a facility with enough space for weddings, funeral gatherings, and large meetings, hosting over three hundred such events each year.

Under Gil's guidance, a plan was developed to conduct a fund-raising campaign to raise \$250,000, an amount sufficient to help insure Skyline's future. The funds would be housed in the Foundation. When needed, annual earnings could be used to assist with Skyline expenses. The plan also outlined an allowance for the use of principal only once every five years if necessary.

Meetings with individual potential donors, businesses, BRF Rotary and Lions Clubs and other groups were scheduled. A targeted mailing was sent to interested residents of the city and county asking them to consider a five-year pledge of \$1000, \$2500, \$5000, \$10,000, \$25,000 or \$50,000. The amazing generosity of this community resulted in pledges from ninety-four households, businesses and groups totaling just over \$590,000, with each and every pledge being fulfilled.

Again in 2020 Gil headed up a plan to replace the aging golf carts at Skyline. Securing a significant matching donation from the Foundation, Gil, Fred, Buz and I recruited twenty eight additional donors to raise a total of \$160,000. These donations allowed Skyline to obtain 34 new carts and to start a cart replacement fund for the future.

Dennis Young,
Foundation Trustee & Skyline Treasurer

Swimming from Start to Finish

In 1996, the Foundation was interested in purchasing land to create a public park. At the same time Milt & Lydia Lunda were looking into plans to replace the old swimming pool. An arrangement was reached between the Foundation, Milt & Lydia Lunda, and the Lunda Charitable Trust. Milt and Lydia agreed to contribute one million dollars; contingent on a swimming pool being located within the park, and on the Foundation raising the remaining funds needed. The Hoffman Family agreed to fund the aquatic center portion of the park. Gil has always had good ideas on how to fundraise for projects and this was a big one. Gil suggested we break down the project into segments, with each segment having a sponsor. Gil did what he does best, and the park became a reality.

During construction, Trustees discussed ways to recognize donors, both large and small, within the park. It was unanimously agreed that the park be named in honor of Milt and Lydia Lunda, the aquatic center be named in honor of the Hoffman Family, the shelter building be named in honor of Clifford and Blanche Nelson, and the two softball fields be named the Rotary Field and the Nelson Industries Field. Also, anyone who had donated fifty dollars or more would have their name placed on a paving brick within the park. There were 323 donors who pledged \$563,331 to the Community Park Fundraising Campaign.

Through the Foundation, Gil presented ideas that became a dynamic and driving force behind many community projects. Those projects have “enhanced the quality of life in the Black River Falls Area” just as Gil intended when he wrote the Foundation’s mission statement thirty-six years ago.

David Hoffman, Vice-Chairman
BRF Area Foundation

Setting the Bar

Before coming home to BRF, Gil lived in Madison and was familiar with the “Big City Foundation”. His brilliant idea was to use the Foundation concept in a small-town setting. This had never been done before.

Gil recruited some fellow Rotarians and we met in the bank meeting room at 7 a.m. several times a week. You would be surprised how much work there is to organizing a 501(c)3 when you don’t have a cause. We wanted a fund drive to get money from folks so we could give money to other folks. We did eventually sell the idea, made our modest beginning, and BRF became the first small community in the entire U.S. to have a community Foundation!

After a couple of years, I noticed how many requests we got from BRF teachers, far more than we could help with Foundation funds. I had the idea to start an Educational Enrichment Fund. We were able to do this by creating a donor advised fund, with the Foundation as ‘the Mother Ship’. I made an original donation and organized a board of directors for the Education Enrichment Fund. As a part of the Foundation we were able to raise funds without hurdling regulations, and meet IRS requirements for auditing without the expense of hiring an accountant. Without the Foundation, the ‘red-tape’ would have made the creation of the EEF nearly impossible. The BRF-EEF is now more than \$450,000. Because the EEF does not have to wait for the school budgeting process, its able to quickly provide grants to help teachers. None of this could have happened without Gil’s great insight. It was an idea that will help the BRF Area for many, many years to come.

Al Lahmayer
Originating Foundation Trustee

Jackson County Interfaith Caregivers

Foundation Roots in Faith

In 1987 a private donor from California wanted to make a gift of \$15,000 to start a BRF Community organization. To create this new organization, which would assist homebound older adults and people with disabilities, an established local organization had to take responsibility for, and hold, the funds until the program could be established. While the future of such a program was very much unknown, Gil believed the idea was not only possible, but also sustainable. Under his direction, the JC Ministerial Association agreed to form a steering committee to research the idea and pursue grants from the Public Welfare Foundation and the Retirement Research Foundation.

In 1989, the Foundation turned over the start-up funds, Karen Foust was hired as program manager, and Jackson County Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers was born. That first year Interfaith had ninety trained volunteers that served thirty-nine individuals. The rest, as they say, is history. For 28 years, Karen’s direction allowed Interfaith’s consistent growth. Every year more individuals continue to volunteer to help with an increasing number of people in need. Upon Karen’s retirement in 2017, Lori Chown was hired as her successor. The dedication and commitment of these incredible women is in large part the reason for Interfaith’s tremendous success.

Julie Murray Executive Director
BRF Area Foundation

In a time of communicating through, email, text messages, and a variety of other technology, Gil Homstad, hand writes personal "thank you" notes. I received one of those notes in 2017 from Gil when I retired from Interfaith. That note reminded me that Gil is much more than beyond a community leader and successful businessman. Gil Homstad has compassion, kindness, and respect toward all people.

In 1989, Gil, along with other people from the foundation, had the wisdom, vision, and faith to see that Jackson County had, and will continue to have, an aging population that needs support. My note, which I have saved, reminds me that Gil is a man of integrity that strives to do best for the good of all.

Karen Foust Program Director (Retired)
Jackson County Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers

When you look at the Black River Falls community and the foundation it has been built on, you can't not think about Gil Homstad. Gil has been instrumental in so many projects throughout our community.

By ____ (year) Interfaith had ____ volunteers serving ____ individuals and had outgrown their facilities long ago. When Interfaith set out to do a building campaign, we knew we would need someone with a great deal of fundraising expertise, so we contacted Gil. Gil was instrumental in the planning phase of our capital campaign. Gil's insight into community fundraising was vital for the success of our project, which raised over \$2 million dollars.

As we maneuvered through the campaign, we had frequent conversations with Gil to see how to best communicate the next steps. Gil has a natural ability to analyze community issues, and the foresight and knowledge to address those issues.

In the past Interfaith has reached out to Gil to assist with questions on investments and sustainability. Gil's knowledge and expertise in these areas provided us with key tools to ensure that Interfaith will continue to grow.

When I think about community impact, I often reflect on this quote from Mother Teresa. "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." The ripples that Gil has created in our community have built the Black River Falls Area Foundation, the industrial park, community parks, non-profits, and much more. His impact will continue to ripple across our community for generations to come.

Lori Chown Program Director
Jackson County Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers

Skating to Success

Late in 2004 the local Rotary Club was discussing potential projects that the Club could sponsor in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Rotary International. One of the projects being considered was the construction of a skatepark. A group of Rotary Club members met with the Mayor and Steve Peterson, Parks and Recreation Director for the City. Based on the group's recommendation, the Club decided to sponsor construction of the skatepark as it's 100th anniversary project with the cooperation of the City and the Black River Falls Area Foundation.

During 2005, Club members worked with the City, potential contractors and local skaters to develop a design and budget for the park. In October of 2005, the design and budget were completed. The Club asked for volunteers to conduct the fund-raising effort and Gil naturally stepped up to take a leadership role. The total project budget was \$344,000, which included a \$30,000 maintenance fund recommended by Gil to ensure that money would be available without having to depend on the City's resources.

I had never been involved in raising this amount of money for a community project and I was impressed by Gil's strategy, tactics, and enthusiasm. We developed a list of potential donors, established a target donation for each one, and assigned volunteers to approach each donor. The target donation was based on the donor's participation in past projects, and we also relied on Gil's intuition.

I was particularly impressed with Gil's utilization of a target donation. As a business owner, I had been asked for donations many times. Often, when I would ask how much the organization would like from me the answer would be "whatever you'd like to give." This made it awkward because I had no idea if they were looking for \$500 or \$5,000. Most of the skatepark donors reacted very positively to a target donation because they knew the amount of our request and could make their decision accordingly.

Fund-raising was completed on schedule and enough additional money was raised to provide lighting in the park, which was not part of the original budget. Construction began in June of 2006 and a grand opening was held on August 13th.

In July of 2014, significant improvements and renovations were made to the Skate Park. Thanks to Gil's foresight, funds were available in the Rotary Skate Park maintenance fund to cover these expenses. Today there remains more than fifteen thousand dollars in this fund which continues to accumulate investment earnings.

Gil provided a great deal of advice and guidance though the entire process including preparation of a brochure, pledge forms, and presentations. Most importantly he taught the least experienced of us how to ask for a donation by explaining the benefits of the project and by showing our enthusiasm and commitment. Gil had a fantastic ability to communicate his vision for the skatepark and clarify how it would benefit the community. Gil's vision, passion and dedication showed his commitment to every project that he was involved in.

Mike Dougherty, Co-Treasurer
BRF Area Foundation

Mary Van Gorden

Making History

To be an effective leader a person needs to possess a high level of professional/technical knowledge plus outstanding interpersonal relationship skills. Gil Homstad has an abundance of both. I learned this, first-hand, while serving on the Board of Directors at the Jackson County Bank and then when helping Gil organize the Prime Time Club at the Bank.

When plans for a new library in Black River Falls were initiated, I made a commitment to include a "Jackson County History Room" and was asked to organize a planning committee. As our plans

developed, we shared them with Gil and benefited greatly from his suggestions. Because he has deep roots in Jackson County and an interest in local history, Gil gave us encouragement and wise counsel.

Financing the ongoing operation of the History Room became an important subject as the building of the Library progressed. Once again, I turned to Gil for advice. By then the Black River Falls Area Foundation had been established, and Gil guided me in setting up an endowment fund to subsidize the Room. This was done in August of 1995.

During the ensuing years, Gil kept me involved in the utilization of my fund, including the need for changes as they occurred. It was obvious, then, that as Chairman of the Foundation's Board of Trustees Gil was a hands-on leader, deeply committed to and highly qualified for his position. Working with Gil is always a pleasure. His insight and vision and his kind manner make him a superb leader and advisor. Many of the outstanding facilities in our community, including the Jackson County History Room, have benefited greatly from his involvement. Also benefiting have been the many donors, from far and near, who have learned valuable lessons about the art of philanthropy from this expert, Gil Homstad.

Mary Van Gorden
Long-time Foundation Supporter