

THE FIRST ✿ THE ONLY

VeroBeach

Magazine®

JUNE 2021

McKee Botanical Garden is home to two of our county's designated woodland wonders

Champion Trees





JEFFREY R. PICKERING

Data for a Difference

JEFF PICKERING, INDIAN RIVER COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PRESIDENT AND CEO, INTRODUCES NEW RESOURCES

Our local residents are some of the most generous people in America. A Florida Nonprofit Alliance report indicates that the share of households in our county that donates money is greater than both the national and state averages. In recent years, more than \$200 million has been given annually by Indian River County residents of all income levels. These donations combine with public funds to support local programs and projects that improve lives and make our community a truly special place to live.

Some of the benefits

of giving are immediately obvious. If you are a donor – someone who is inspired to give in response to a specific appeal – you know that your contributions provide necessary cash flow to support and sustain an organization’s programs and services. If you are a philanthropist – someone who treats your charitable giving like an investment – you can see that your contributions enable capital improvements, bring promising practices to scale and fund innovative ideas to solve persistent problems.

But how do we know we’re really making a difference? My team and

I at Indian River Community Foundation are working hard to answer that question. Over the course of the next year, I’ll be sharing what we’re learning in this column. This month, I’ll outline the new resources available on the IRCF website. In each of the upcoming months, I’ll write about a specific area of need. I’ll connect the dots between community needs and their root causes while offering insights into challenges and analyzing meaningful solutions.

While these resources can be used by readers to make more informed giving decisions, they will also make it possible

IRCF ONLINE RESOURCES

irccommunityfoundation.org



Nonprofit Search is a current, comprehensive resource to find, learn about and give directly to more than 100 IRS 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organizations in Indian River County. It provides free access to Guidestar profiles of the most accountable, transparent local charities with information about each organization's governance, management, financial position and programs.



Indian River Indicators provides free, on-demand access to current data and information about community needs in the following areas: children and education, economic opportunity and employment, health, housing and seniors. Customized reports will also be available upon request.



Finally, Indian River Insights, published here and accessible on the IRCF website, will explore the root causes of community needs, celebrate successes, analyze meaningful solutions, and offer insights into persistent challenges.

to develop collective solutions to community challenges.

This information and the analysis it makes possible will enable us to measure our progress and focus our efforts to make a real difference in our county.

Charity, philanthropy, public dollars and the community leaders entrusted to steward them deserve credit for the work they do every day to address some of our community's biggest problems. Even in the midst of annual preparation for hurricanes and the ongoing efforts to mitigate the effects of a global pandemic, several indicators of community health or prosperity have recently improved.

- Infant mortality has decreased.

- Kindergarten readiness, grade-level reading, and high school graduation rates have all increased.

- Access to medical, dental and behavioral health has increased.

- Unemployment has declined.

Nonetheless, perennial systemic challenges persist. Fully one-half of the county's households are financially stressed, living either in poverty or one paycheck away from it. Low wages and the high cost of housing in Indian River County

have contributed to one of the widest income gaps between the top 1% and bottom 99% of earners – we rank 10th out of 3,061 counties nationwide. More than 50% of our residents are considered by the USDA as having “low food access,” meaning they live more than one mile away from healthy, affordable food. Conservatively, it is estimated that close to 500 community residents are homeless, including more than 150 children.

So while we are fortunate that Indian River County residents are generous and tax dollars tend to be administered prudently, it's incumbent upon us to take a more proactive stance. Imagine what might be possible when we apply a 21st-century approach and actually measure our progress as a community. We're excited to launch these new resources and look forward to engaging in this work with all of you throughout the year.

Next month, we'll take a close look at how the children in our community are faring; we'll highlight places where our efforts to help are working well and explore ideas to target persistent challenges. I invite all of you to join me in this effort to make our county an even better place to live. ☘