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Birdies are plentiful at

Audubon Golf Courses

Information on Indian River County nonprofits can be found easily online, leading to more informed giving.

Make Giving Count

DATA CAN SUPPORT THE PRACTICE OF EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY

BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

Fourteen billion years ago, all the matter that would ever be present in the universe was contained in a space one-trillionth the size of the period at the end of this sentence. It was hot. A "Big Bang" followed, scattering matter across a universe that eventually cooled off enough for Earth to form and for life as we know it to emerge.

My knowledge of the origins of the universe was recently refreshed by reading *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry* by American astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. While turning each page, I found it helpful to keep the Google browser on my iPhone open and a copy of the periodic table handy as a reference.

As I read, I observed that from about 2.5 million

years ago, when some of the first humans began to walk the earth, through the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, and into the modern era, most of what we made or created through our work could be measured by some combination of elements on this periodic table. Our sense of self-worth could be

measured by things we could observe and touch, such as the furniture built by carpenters and the produce grown by farmers.

With the advent of the digital era, for the first time in human history, this is not the case. "Matter" is not all that matters. Instead, there are lots of zeros and ones.

We produce bits and bytes. We gather, analyze, and distribute big data. We rely on machine learning and artificial intelligence. We mine, accumulate, and exchange cryptocurrency using blockchain technology. We dream about the metaverse. There are algorithms for everything.

As your community foundation's CEO, however, I am writing to tell you that there is no algorithm for making our community better through philanthropy. Achieving that goal takes generous people like you using current data and practicing informed giving to support the nonprofit sector that serves our residents' needs.

Somewhere in all the big data is general information about our area's charities. In 2022, there were 832 501(c)(3) charitable organizations based in Indian River County. Only 175 of these were large enough to be required to file an annual financial report with the IRS. Together, these organizations either earned or fundraised more than $382 million last year

Making a real difference, whether it's through donations of time or money, hinges on finding useful information on the organizations you choose to support.

and represent the core of our community's nonprofit sector.

Of the 175 largest charities in Indian River County, 6 percent—mostly health-related organizations—earned or fundraised more than $10 million in annual revenue; 23 percent earned or fundraised between $1 million and $10 million annually, and 71 percent
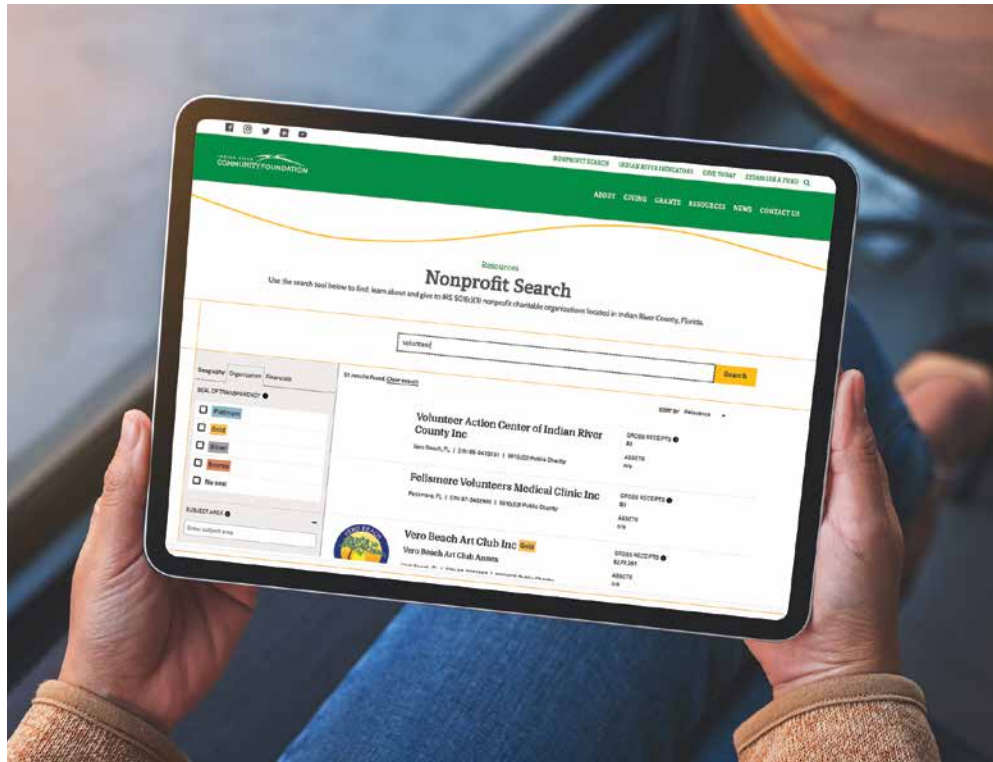
brought in less than $1 million.

Just as they vary widely in size, the county's nonprofits vary widely in mission. The greatest number of organizations work in the human services field, followed by environmental and animal protection, arts and culture, education, and health. On the contrary, the categories with the fewest

organizations are housing, economic development, and public safety.

Last year, our county's nonprofits were financed by more than $110 million in contributions. With more than 29 percent of all revenue coming from charitable gifts, Indian River County charities raise more than twice the national average. This fundraising

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The Nonprofit Search page on the Indian River Community Foundation's website is a tool to use to determine which organizations fit your needs.

is supported by an annual household giving rate of almost 6 percent of adjusted gross income across all income levels.

We certainly have a citizenry that gives generously to sustain proven programs and to support promising practices and social innovation that make our community better.

Knowing this has motivated Indian River Community Foundation to develop tools and resources to help local residents practice philanthropy effectively.

Whether you are a donor, a philanthropist, or an otherwise interested member of the community, finding the information needed to know that your donated

time, talent, or treasure is making a real difference can be challenging. Both taxpayers and charitable contributors deserve to know that these dollars are achieving results. Until recently, however, no contemporaneous, comprehensive resource has existed in Indian River County to indicate whether such

progress is being made.

Over the last several years, Indian River Community Foundation has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop several tools and resources that fill this gap and support more informed giving decisions by local residents. One of the most powerful tools is the online Nonprofit Search—a current, comprehensive resource to find, learn about, and give directly to more than 100 IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organizations located in Indian River County. Available at *ircommunityfoundation. org*, this online tool 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.

Other tools and resources are also being used by community stakeholders to develop collective impact and policy solutions to community challenges. Launched after the 2020 publication of the Community Needs Assessment, Indian River Indicators is

Progress is being made in Indian River County when it comes to taking care of our teens' mental health.

a current, comprehensive database that measures indicators of the health and prosperity of the county's residents. Available at *ircommunityfoundation. org*, this online platform provides free, on-demand access to current data and information about community needs among vulnerable populations that include children and seniors, and within important fields of health, education, economic opportunity, and housing.

It is our hope that these tools and resources help achieve results and generate compelling success stories about the good work being done in our community by

the institutions we hold in the public trust.

One recent example of progress is in teen mental health. In 2020, the rate of hospitalization for mood and depressive disorders for children under the age of 18 was more than twice that of Florida, at 1,003 hospitalizations per 100,000. Prior to 2020, there were no local resources available for teens experiencing mental health challenges that required more intensive support than counseling but not hospitalization.

Using data and information from the recent Community Needs Assessment to identify a gap in

the local continuum of care, funders, including the Indian River County Hospital District, Indian River Community Foundation, United Way, and Johns Island Community Service League, provided financial support to Cleveland Clinic Indian River Behavioral Health Center to develop a solution.

As a result, a 10-week intensive outpatient program for teens, which had seen success as a promising practice in Cleveland, Ohio, was implemented for Indian River County. Since launching in the fall of 2021, this adolescent intensive outpatient program is

serving approximately 100 teens annually by providing needed care and preventing adverse outcomes such as unnecessary hospitalization or suicide.

With more than 14 billion years behind us, I cannot think of a better place to live than this special community. To keep making it better, I encourage you to continue to give generously and consider how you might use the Nonprofit Search and Indian River Indicators to make more informed decisions that can lead to something better, something healthier, something more prosperous for all. ❉