

## Forty-year History of the Colorado Women's Education Foundation

As with any organization celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Colorado Women's Education Foundation (CWEF) has adapted repeatedly to changing times and varying needs and priorities. Over the decades, CWEF has made changes to its name and refined its mission, as well as having made adjustments to how it raised funds and delivered services. The one constant over the years has been the resolution and goal of being an organization of women reaching out to other women to elevate their lives through the gift of education. Since its inception, CWEF has provided over 500 women with scholarships totaling nearly \$400,000.



CWEF was initially incorporated as the Colorado Business and Professional Women Foundation in 1976. The Colorado Federation of Business and Professional Women (Colorado BPW) organization, founded in 1919, had approved the formation of a foundation at its 1975 state convention. Eight women attended the first organizational meeting on January 10, 1976, in Golden, Colorado, to create the Colorado Business Professional Women (BPW) Foundation, Inc. The two entities would be sister organizations and interconnected through bylaw references. During that meeting the Foundation's first slate of officers were elected: Neva Craig, chairman; Pat White, vice chairman; Carmen C. Johnson, secretary; and Eleanor Foley, treasurer. All of the elected officers were former Colorado BPW Board Presidents or board members. One of the eight women, Anne Steinbeck, remains a prominent figure in the Foundation's history because of her funding of the Anne F. Steinbeck Named Scholarship Award.

That same year the founding trustees considered a letter they received "expressing the misgivings of the National Federation [of BPW] about the establishment of state foundations. It was the consensus of the trustees to go ahead with the formation of the Colorado Foundation," according to minutes of the meeting. As Anne Steinbeck remembers, "There was discouragement from national about states having their own foundations; they felt it took support from them." The Internal Revenue Service recognized the Foundation as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with tax-exempt status in June 1977.

The scholarship fund intended to benefit women from the Project "K" Home, along with three other funds, established the financial underpinning of the Foundation. The Florence Sabin Scholarship Fund was established "to aid persons in graduate study in the field of public health." The Hester Smith Educational Fund was intended "to make loans available for applicants to further their education or training for a career," and the M. Helen Hankins Fellowship Fund was established to "promote graduate research in problems of interest to business and professional women." These funds totaled about \$11,000. At the close of the fiscal year ending May 1978, assets were more than \$15,000 and income was \$3,386.

Some of the first grants were in the form of loans requiring insurance policies security. The minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting on June 4, 1978, indicate that a discussion centered on recipient qualifications and guidelines for loans and grants. At that meeting, "there were no applications for scholarships to be considered." The Foundation decided to publish its first brochure, with its "message simply stated." A "more elaborate" brochure would be created later, the trustees agreed.

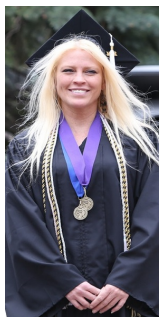
During 1979, "Foundation Bricks" were sold at the Colorado BPW convention and 3,000 copies of the first brochure were printed at an expense of \$289. The trustees considered an application for a loan from a woman who "asked for aid in publishing her book 'The Galloping Goose' in Braille." That same year

the trustees tried to negotiate with a recipient who had suffered health problems and had not made payments on her loan. At one point, a trustee proposed that boyfriends not be allowed to write letters of recommendation.

In the early 1980s a Board of Trustees document asked, “Do YOU want to be a Trustee?” Prospective board members, according to the document, should be responsible, decisive, congenial, knowledgeable in financial matters, empathetic, and open-minded. Trustees also should believe in the mission of the Foundation, invest time, and have a sense of humor, according to the document. Trustees should not expect to be reimbursed for their expenses. Answering yes to “six out of nine [requirements] ain’t bad,” the document said. “If you want a three-year term, GO FOR IT. Map out your campaign and get out the vote at State Convention!”

The Foundation’s first annual report was published in 1997. It described an Endowment Fund totaling slightly less than \$100,000. The trustees embarked on “Endowment Campaign 2001” with the goal of raising the Endowment Fund to \$300,000 by 2001 to provide more scholarships. The endowment was growing because of a sound investment program and contributions from corporations, foundations, local and state BPW organizations, and individuals. Carol Grever Gray, a former English professor, successful entrepreneur, and philanthropist, was by far the largest donor with her endowed named scholarship of \$100,000. Carol shared, “My experience with the staffing industry made me acutely aware of the necessity of job-related skills and education to open possibilities for career advancement. I saw daily that women without marketable skills were trapped in dead-end jobs. I determined to do all that I could to fund opportunities for such women to reach economic self-sufficiency. When my company sold in 1995, the proceeds gave me the means to follow this dream through wholehearted support of the Foundation.”

During 1998 the board president, Theresa Szczurek, Ph.D., led the way by pledging \$25,000 to endow a scholarship in her name. Additionally, a \$25,000 endowed scholarship, named the Colorado BPW State Presidents, was created with contributions from past presidents and members. These were two of four such endowed scholarships of \$25,000. By 2000 there were also eight named scholarships of \$10,000 or more. Through a diverse and growing tapestry of supporters and the unwavering diligence of the trustees, the goal of \$300,000 was exceeded in 2001 and the Endowment Fund was protected in perpetuity.



The word “Education” was added to the name in 2003 to more accurately describe the Foundation’s purpose. As well, the mission of the Colorado Business and Professional Women’s Education Foundation (CBPWEF) was refined and changed from “Helping women attain self-sufficiency through education.” to “Investing in women who are transforming their lives through education...for themselves, their families, and their communities.” The Foundation focused its investment in women on those of non-traditional student age: at least 25 years old. The minimum scholarship amount was raised to \$500 in 2004 and a wonderful new website [www.cbpwef.org](http://www.cbpwef.org) was unveiled.

In 2005 the yearly scholarship cycles were reduced from three to two to lower the Foundation’s expenses. By 2006 there were five endowed scholarships of \$25,000 each and 13 named scholarships of \$10,000 or more. Multipronged fundraising activities, such as “Brunches-Lunches” were used to raise funds. During 2008 the Foundation gained the capability to accept donations online at its website. Additionally, that year’s annual report stated, “Our success is not possible without the generous financial support of the Colorado BPW state and local organizations.” Since the Foundation was originally created as the philanthropic arm of Colorado BPW to provide scholarships to women, this powerful relationship benefits both the women receiving scholarships and the women providing financial support.

The name of CBPWEF was shortened to the “Colorado Women’s Education Foundation” (CWEF) in 2010 as it was easier to recognize and remember. Along with simplifying its name, CWEF launched an innovative and contemporary website [www.cwef.org](http://www.cwef.org) to better facilitate the sharing of its story with website visitors and donors, as well as to make the scholarship application available online to potential applicants. That same year CWEF hosted its first “Legacy of Learning” fundraising event with featured speaker and author, Carlotta Walls LaNier. The 2nd Annual Legacy of Learning fundraising event featured Temple Grandin, Ph.D., a Colorado State University professor, bestselling author, and autism advocate.

In an effort to continue to bring CWEF’s image into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a modern and memorable logo with the distinctive colors of purple and teal was created in 2012. This logo more accurately depicted the Foundation’s mission, identity, and branding. During 2013 the yearly scholarship cycles were reduced from two to one per year to manage expenses and allow more time for fundraising efforts. In order to establish more of a relationship with scholarship recipients than in the past, staff increased the regularity and thoroughness of communication with recipients.

Innovation and vitality defined 2014 for CWEF. Wanting an effective promotional tool, a contemporary and informative brochure was created featuring the Foundation’s new logo and color scheme. A Board of Directors’ Manual (BODM) was developed to successfully guide board recruitment, engagement, and development. This BODM included general operating procedures and new board member recruitment steps and methods, as well as outlining CWEF’s governance, organization, and policies. The minimum scholarship amount was raised to \$1,000. CWEF hosted its Legacy of Learning - Wine, Cheese and Chocolate fundraising event on March 8<sup>th</sup> to highlight and accentuate the annual celebration of International Women’s Day; as well as to raise much needed scholarship funds.

The highly successful Legacy of Learning - Wine, Cheese and Chocolate fundraising event was repeated in March 2015. Making two additional scholarship investments of \$10,000 in 2015 and 2013, Carol Grever, wrote, “Keep up the good work on behalf of underserved women seeking to improve their future through education.” CWEF’s scholarship recipients have benefitted immensely from Carol’s continuing support. Scholarships were awarded to 16 high-achieving women, with an average age of 38 years. CWEF continued to pursue innovative strategies to generate greater public awareness of its good work by creating more of a presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Using an appreciative inquiry process, the trustees worked collaboratively to develop a new strategic plan. Additionally, CWEF completed all the stringent requirements of the Community First Foundation in order to participate as a nonprofit in Colorado Gives Day on December 8, 2015, the largest one-day, online giving day in the county.

As CWEF prepares to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016, the trustees remain committed to and energized by its mission. The trustees are so inspired by the successes scholarship recipients share about how their lives and the lives of others have changed as a result of their commitment to furthering their education with support from CWEF. Forty years later Anne Steinbeck shares, “Every dollar I have invested in the Colorado Women's Education Foundation has been returned in many happy moments seeing the achievements of the scholarship recipients and the difference it has made in their lives.”



CWEF looks forward to the next 40 years of helping women become more economically self-sufficient by “Investing in women who are transforming their lives through education...for themselves, their families, and their communities.” Join us in continuing to turn our mission into reality for more deserving women!