

SHELLEY Strickland

AIMS TO MAKE PHILANTHROPISTS OF US ALL

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She's the CEO of the Charlotte Community Foundation

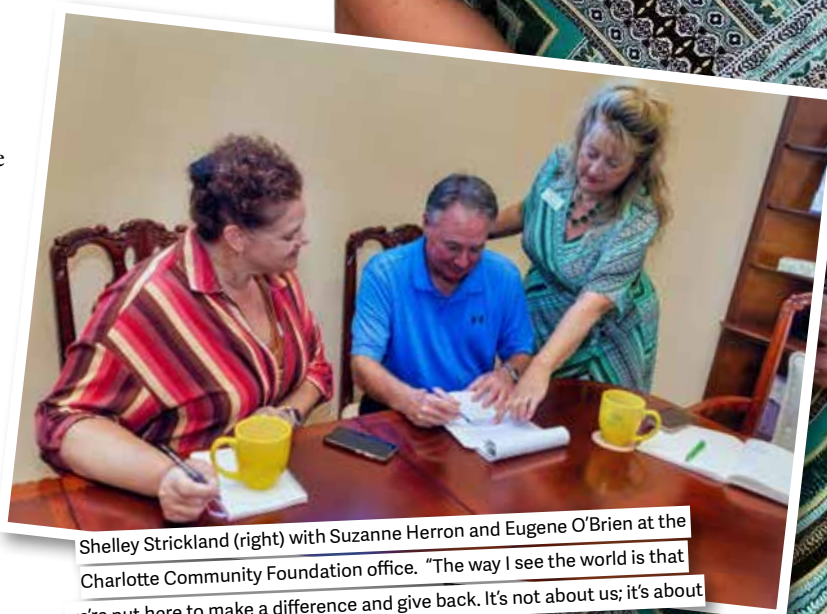
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PHOTOS BY **STEVE LINEBERRY**

PORT CHARLOTTE — Many people don't understand what Charlotte Community Foundation is.

But its new CEO, Shelley Strickland, says a community foundation is as easy to understand as the coins she dropped into the offering plate at her grandfather's parish.

The granddaughter of a Detroit pastor, she has vivid memories of being called to the pulpit at the age of five and asked to say a few words to the people.

“Even with that,” she said, “I was shy. When I was nine and nervous about asking another little girl to play, my father gave me a Barbara Walters book about how to talk



Shelley Strickland (right) with Suzanne Herron and Eugene O'Brien at the Charlotte Community Foundation office. “The way I see the world is that we're put here to make a difference and give back. It's not about us; it's about what we can do for others,” Strickland said.

2025

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PORT CHARLOTTE

to anybody about anything. It really forced me out of my comfort zone, and I'm grateful that he did that."

If he hadn't, Strickland might not have been here in Charlotte County, establishing relationships and encouraging us to think of CCF as a savings account for the community, to which all of us can contribute.

The foundation's board invests donors' contributions (endowments) and puts hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest back into the community in the form of grants to nonprofits and scholarships to young people and working adults.

Since its formation, CCF has granted nearly \$14 million to local nonprofits and \$1.2 million in scholarships.

So far this year, 29 organizations have received \$80,000 in grants, and the 2025-2026 Scholarship Program positions CCF as the county's largest scholarship provider, offering \$260,000 to 65 students.

"Because CCF's business is philanthropy — and community-based philanthropy at that — the organization is really about the impact that a broad group of community members — volunteers and donors alike — makes possible," said Strickland.

As the seventh leader of the 20-year-old foundation and the first with community foundation experience, her immersion in Charlotte County was immediate.

When she moved here 18 months ago, after leading the Ann Arbor (Michigan) Area Community Foundation, she set out to understand her new community — exploring well beyond the foundation's Punta Gorda headquarters.

"And I'm still learning," she said.

Strickland has studied, taught courses in and written a book about philanthropy and community foundations, all of which put her in a perfect position to spread the word about giving in her new hometown.

The foundation currently lists more than \$25 million in assets — \$13.7 million in

Her personal mission remains focused, not on herself, but on education and encouraging others to reach their full potential.

"I think if you're in the philanthropic business because of your own ego, you're not in the right career, because it's really about the impact of the work being done."

She said philanthropy enhances people's lives — including the donors.

"We know that giving makes you feel good and that volunteering is a way to make connections. People are lonely and craving that sense of belonging, of being part of an organization with a broad focus and a broad impact that's really about serving the whole community.

"The way I see the world is that we're put here to make a difference and give back. It's not about us; it's about what we can do for others. My grandfather was a role model for me in that way. I

was fortunate to have strong relationships with my parents and grandparents, who've all been those kind of selfless givers, not just of money but of their time and whatever resources they had."

Strickland said that's why the community-based aspect resonates with her so deeply.

"It wasn't just me back then in my grandfather's church. My coins were going into that offering plate with others. It was all of us getting together, doing something greater and feeling part of something bigger than ourselves." *BW*

To learn more about the Charlotte Community Foundation, visit charlottecf.org



46 endowed funds, half of which have been established since Strickland joined CCF.

The board and Strickland are proud that most of the new endowments are from living donors, compared to only 35% of endowments being from living donors in the past.

"We can't just sit and wait for the next big estate to help us out," she said. "We have to rebrand ourselves and look to the future."

Part of that future will come from a new program allowing donors to establish a permanent endowed fund for as little as \$5,000.

"That makes it accessible for more people to feel they can make a difference," Strickland said. "We want it to be inclusive of the whole community, on the donor side, too."