

Flemington *Life*

Holiday Issue 2023

FREE

Women in the Lead: Hunterdon's Impact100



POWER in Numbers



PHOTO BY DAVE NORTON

Members of Impact100 Hunterdon's leadership council, from left: Lynn Becker, Michelle Heide, Mary Alley, Jerri May-Grimes, Bonnie Duncan, Colleen Duerr, and Carolyn Evans.

A new organization of Hunterdon County women plans to award a \$100,000 grant to a deserving local charity in 2024 and become “an unstoppable force for good.”

BY TRACY ECCLESINE IVIE

It's simple math: 100 times 1,000 equals 100,000.

To a group of energetic women who want to make a difference in Hunterdon County, those numbers are especially significant. By the end of next year, thanks to this same mathematical equation, they expect to award a \$100,000 grant to a deserving nonprofit that also wants to make a difference—a much more significant difference than usual.

Here's how it works: 100 women who join Impact100 Hunterdon will each contribute \$1,000. Next spring, they'll accept grant applications from nonprofits in five categories (health and wellness, education, family, culture, and environment), narrow the field to three finalists, and vote on a winner at a gala event in December 2024.

The winning grant will represent an infusion of cash so large that the

selected nonprofit can use it for innovative programming or services they could only dream of before.

“They're not applying for an existing program. They're not applying for general operating funds. They're creating a transformative project that can only happen with big dollars,” says Michelle Heide, a member of Impact100 Hunterdon's leadership council.

The Hunterdon group is one of the newest chapters of Impact100, an international organization founded in 2001. Its goal is to empower women as philanthropists “who care deeply, dream wildly, and believe that together they're an unstoppable force for good.” Since its founding, Impact100 has raised more than \$120 million in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

“They’re creating a transformative project that can only happen with big dollars.”

-Michelle Heide

Hunterdon’s chapter began this spring under the auspices of Binnacle House in Flemington, a community foundation that provided the nonprofit framework for the new group, guidance, and meeting space. While associated with Binnacle House, Impact100 operates independently under the direction of a leadership council.

“Our goal is about leveraging philanthropy for everybody within the community,” says Lawrence Brooks, executive director of Binnacle House. Brooks suggested bringing the Impact100 program to Hunterdon since he had applied for a grant with the Florida chapter while running a youth shelter there. Even though he wasn’t successful with the application, donations poured in as a result of the exposure, he says.

Jerri May-Grimes, a member of the Binnacle House Board of Directors and chair of the new Impact100 Hunterdon organization, says she thinks the program “can really grow exponentially. I’m so excited about this initiative.”

About 30 women are already members, and the goal is to reach 100 by April. The leadership council of eight women—including many who have served on other nonprofit boards—meets monthly. As with any new organization, the challenge is to spread the word. Thanks to several informal gatherings at women’s homes, the message is getting out. The first get-together was at the home of Jeannie Colalillo, who’s well known in the area for philanthropy, along with her husband, Joe, owner of several ShopRite stores. “It was amazing how contagious the excitement and enthusiasm was with a room full of women that

share the same vision,” Grimes says. “We really had a successful evening.”

Bonnie Duncan, a nonprofit consultant, former CEO of United Way, and a member of the leadership council, says grants of \$100,000 are rare and could be used, among other things, to fill a much-needed gap in services, upgrade facilities or start a capital campaign. The only stipulation is that it is a new initiative. “I’d like to think that anything is possible,” she notes.

As for Impact100’s emphasis on women, Duncan says research shows women traditionally make the majority of household decisions on charitable contributions. “Given my past work in the philanthropic arena, I really felt there was a need to do something new to bring together philanthropic women for a cause,” she says.

Heide was one of those women. A financial planner who’s also on the board of the Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce, she heard about Impact100 several years ago while visiting a friend in Michigan. She immediately knew she wanted to start a Hunterdon chapter. “I think it’s just a tremendous organization,” she says.

But Heide put the idea on the back burner, thinking she couldn’t do it alone. A few months ago, almost by accident, her passion was rekindled during a Zoom call for the chamber’s Women’s Business Forum when she overheard Grimes talking about a new organization that sounded remarkably like Impact100. Before she knew it, Heide was designated Impact100 Hunterdon’s spokesperson, officially sharing news about the organization at a summit for the Women’s Business Forum within weeks of the Zoom call.

Like Heide and Brooks, Colleen Duerr, who also happens to chair the women’s forum, was familiar with the Impact100 movement. A former development director at Family Promise in Flemington, which serves homeless families, she’s a nonprofit consultant who helped one of her clients write a grant application to the organization’s Morristown-based Garden State chapter, which has awarded \$3 million over its ten years of existence. The members were so enthusiastic, according to Duerr, that when Brooks asked her to be on the leadership council, she instantly said yes.

Membership in Impact100 Hunterdon isn’t only for women of means. Any woman can be sponsored by other individuals, companies, or even a book club, for example, where everyone chips in and selects someone as a member. Impact100 is also seeking sponsors to underwrite events and other operating costs since each \$1,000 donation must go to the winning charity, per the group’s charter.

“This is just a great tool to raise awareness about how women can engage in philanthropy in a different way than maybe they have in the past,” Brooks says. □

Tracy Ecclesine Ivie wrote about magician Will Fern in the August Issue of Flemington Life.



COURTESY OF JERRI MAY-GRIMES

Impact100 Hunterdon’s launch event on September 21, hosted by Jeannie Colalillo.

Impact100 Hunterdon will hold an open house for the general public on December 12 at the Hunterdon Chamber of Commerce on 119 Main Street in Flemington from 5 to 7 p.m. For more information, visit binnaclehouse.org/impact100hunterdon.