



Community Foundation

— FOR SAN BENITO COUNTY —

Fall 2026 Quarterly Newsletter **Celebrating Community, Building What's Next**

A letter from Cassandra

Dear friends,

This fall has been an exciting reminder of what is possible when people who care deeply about San Benito County come together around a shared vision for its future.

Last week, more than 150 community members joined us for our first State of the Foundation, where we celebrated our 2026 grantees, officially launched the Community Foundation's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, and shared some of the ways we are working to grow philanthropy, strengthen local organizations, and bring people together around the challenges and opportunities facing our county.

That afternoon was about much more than introducing a plan. It was about the people who make this work possible: nonprofit leaders, donors, volunteers, fund holders, community partners, elected officials, board members, and neighbors who believe, as we do, that San Benito County is capable of extraordinary things when we work together.

You will see that spirit throughout this newsletter.

We are celebrating the students whose ambitions continue to remind us why investing locally matters. We are sharing the remarkable stories behind funds established by people like Joe Tripiano and Connie O'Connor, whose legacy continues to make a difference long after their gifts were first imagined. And we are welcoming two new board members, Lizett Rodriguez Peña and Ann Marie Barragán, who bring deep roots in our community and years of service to the Foundation's work.

There is also much to look forward to this fall, including two opportunities to come together and celebrate the people who strengthen San Benito County. In October, we will mark a decade of Latino Generations and the impact it has had on local students, followed by National Philanthropy Day in November, where we will recognize the generosity and service that help our community thrive.

Our strategic plan asks the Foundation to think bigger about our role in this community, but it also reminds us that lasting change is built through relationships. Our job is not to have every answer ourselves. It is to bring people, resources, ideas, and opportunities together so that our community can accomplish more collectively than any one organization could on its own.

This quarter has given us a wonderful glimpse of what that can look like, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who continues to be part of it.

With gratitude,

Cassandra Kartashov
Chief Executive Officer

[Read our 2026–2030 Strategic Plan](#)

We made the room. You filled it.



We invited the whole county, and you showed up. Neighbors sat beside nonprofit leaders, fund holders beside grantees, volunteers beside elected officials, all in the same room on a Tuesday afternoon.

Board Chair Chang So asked every board member, volunteer, fund holder, partner, and grantee to stand. Nearly everyone in the room rose, offering a powerful visual of just how deeply the Foundation's work is connected to the people and organizations across the county.

The afternoon also created space to celebrate this year's Program and Women's Fund grantees, recognize the many volunteers and partners who make the Foundation's work possible, and highlight the relationships that continue to strengthen philanthropy in San Benito County.

More than anything, the event reflected the role the Foundation hopes to play in the years ahead: bringing people together, connecting resources with community needs, and helping create the conditions for greater collaboration and impact.

The energy in the room made one thing clear — San Benito County has no shortage of people who care deeply about its future.

Cassandra shared where we go next: mobilize \$30 million by 2030 and lead the partnerships that get us there, starting with \$300,000 secured with help from Senator John Laird. But the plan only works the way the afternoon worked, with all of you in it.

Through a \$200,000 investment through The Health Trust, the Foundation is bringing together local partners to strengthen coordination, address gaps in care, and reduce the number of San Benito County residents who could lose access to healthcare.

"We are done competing over crumbs when we should be building a bigger table."

What comes next

Latino Generations 10th Anniversary

"A Decade of Student Success... Appreciating The Past, Cultivating The Future."

Ten years. 127 scholarships. Nearly \$183,000, every dollar raised in this county and awarded to students from it. Celebrate that decade with dinner, dancing, and the students who lived it.

5:00 to 9:30 p.m. at Damm Vineyards, 3028 Cienega Road.

Get Tickets



Latino Generations Committee
10th Anniversary Celebration
A Decade of Student Success

Join us to celebrate a decade of impact and dedication to expand educational opportunities and inspire future generations.

Saturday, October 10, 2026
5:00–9:30 PM

Damm Vineyards
3028 Cienega Rd., Hollister, CA

Dinner, Dance and Motivating Speakers

\$60 per ticket
Tables of 8 available

Scan for tickets

Arturo Muñoz · 831.269.5222 | amunoz@givesanbenito.org

No Host Bar

Appreciating the Past... Cultivating the Future.

Community Foundation FOR SAN BENITO COUNTY

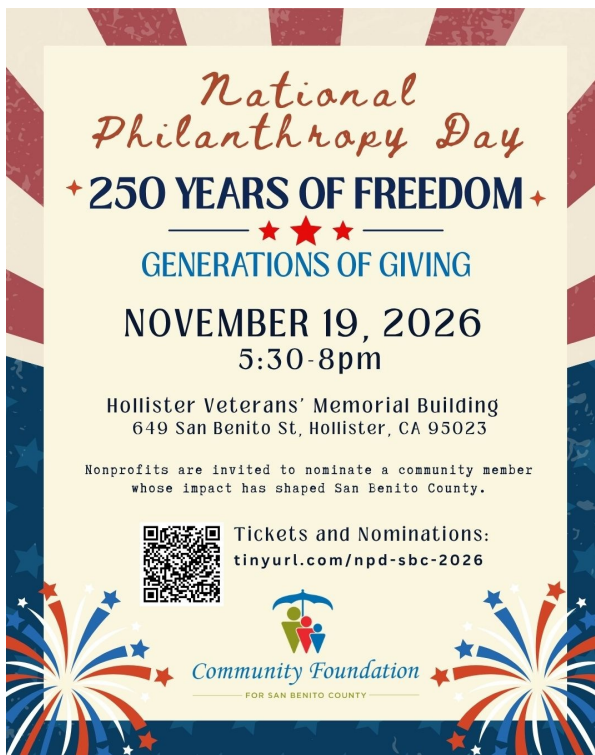
National Philanthropy Day

"250 Years of Freedom, Generations of Giving."

An evening honoring the people who give this county its character. Know someone who deserves recognition? Nominations and registration both close October 30.

5:30 to 8:00 p.m. at 649 San Benito Street, dinner included.

Register and Nominate Someone



National Philanthropy Day
★ **250 YEARS OF FREEDOM** ★
GENERATIONS OF GIVING
NOVEMBER 19, 2026
5:30-8pm

Hollister Veterans' Memorial Building
649 San Benito St, Hollister, CA 95023

Nonprofits are invited to nominate a community member whose impact has shaped San Benito County.

Tickets and Nominations:
tinyurl.com/npd-sbc-2026

Community Foundation FOR SAN BENITO COUNTY

Put your name on the night

Sponsorships for both events start at \$500 and include reserved seating, logo recognition, and visibility all evening. A straightforward way for a local business to be seen standing with students and with the people this county runs on. Tables are also available if you would rather bring your team or your neighbors.

Sponsor an Event

Talk to Arturo Muñoz about either event: amunoz@givesanbenito.org, 831.269.5222

Your funds at work

Three funds held here, and what they make possible.

Latino Generations Endowment Fund • 2026 Recipients •

The clearest way to explain this fund is to introduce the students. Ruth wants to widen the door for other women in STEM. Kaylee wants to build places where young people feel they belong. Frida wants to design dignified housing for farmworking families like her own. Three local graduates, funded by their own neighbors, already thinking about who comes after them.

Meet this year's scholars



Joseph W. Tripiano Charitable Fund • \$1 Million for Next-Generation Vets •

Joe Tripiano spent his life in Hollister looking after animals, especially the old horses nobody else wanted. His fund's gift to Cal Poly's new animal health center buys the equipment future large animal vets will train on. They are badly needed. A 2025 USDA report counted 243 rural areas without enough of them, and in ranching country that gap is often the difference between treating an animal and putting it down.



Read the full story

Connie O'Connor Education Fund · Fund Turns 30 ·

In 1996, Sunnyslope teacher Connie O'Connor told her mother she didn't want flowers when she went. She wanted the money to go to her kids. One month later she died at 26. The fund her mother Joan opened the next day has grown from \$1,600 to more than \$300,000 and has put over \$80,000 into local classrooms. Joan still delivers every check in person.

[Read the full story](#)



Women's Fund · Investing in women and girls ·

This fall, one of our committee members opened her home for the Women's Fund's first mixer of the year, sharing how the committee began and why this work matters to her. Guests heard from Cassandra about the impact ahead and explored ways to get involved. The Fund also hosted "Your Path to Financial Freedom," a three-part series on budgeting, investing, and estate planning led by local experts.



Want to start a fund, or add to one? We would love to talk.
Arturo Muñoz: amunoz@givesanbenito.org, 831.269.5222

New faces at our table

Our board grew this year. Both of our newest members have been doing this work in San Benito County for a long time. Now they're doing it with us.



Lizett Rodriguez Peña
Founder and Managing Attorney, Lizett Rodriguez
Peña Law Firm, APC

The daughter of migrant farmworkers, Lizett grew up between Watsonville and Mexico and built a legal career representing low-income clients, especially farmworkers. Today she practices employment and immigration law in Hollister, serves as President of the San Benito County Bar Association, sits on the Youth Alliance board, and chairs our Latino Generations Scholarship Committee.



Ann Marie Barragán
Owner, Golden Memorial Insurance Services

A Gilroy native who made Hollister home in 1986, Ann Marie left a Silicon Valley career to join her family's business in 1991. She is a past president of the Hazel Hawkins Hospital Foundation, was named 2024 Philanthropist of the Year in Santa Clara County by the Latino Family Fund, and mentors women building businesses of their own.

Support the Foundation

Every story in this newsletter started with someone deciding to give. If you'd like to be part of what comes next, a gift of any size helps us grow philanthropy across San Benito County.

Give Today

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