

## FOUNDATION: Staff met with key players in Sisters community

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The Ford Family Foundation has shifted its emphasis from leadership training to community-building and economic development. In years past, the foundation conducted three leadership-training cohorts in Sisters, each of which resulted in a meaningful contribution to the community.

Under the new initiative, the foundation may decide to partner with, participate in and/or fund projects. The long-range process may continue with help to design a viable approach, and assist with implementation of the community's greatest need.

Their site visit included a walking/driving tour, lunches with longtime residents and outspoken vocal advocates, roundtables with low-income renters, service workers, veterans, senior citizens, and others, especially reaching out to the unvoiced and the unheard.

"I was really impressed by the numerous efforts that people, organizations and institutions are working on in Sisters. Everyone we met shared how much they love Sisters. We enjoyed the many conversations we had over coffee and some shared meals," Barros said.

They talked with business owners in the industrial park, and met with leaders of Sisters School District and Sisters Park & Recreation District.

They heard from people who work in Sisters but can't live here. They made a stop at the Kiwanis Food Bank. They talked to people who work with all kinds of nonprofit organizations.

The largest group meeting was at Sisters Gallery & Frame Shop, with representatives of a dozen or more nonprofits and cohort members (graduates) of Ford Institute Leadership Program. This was an opportunity for them to meet FFF leadership, and to present an overview of opportunities and obstacles. This group represented the community, arts, music, theater, housing, gardening, rodeo, friends of children and more.

They presented positive opportunities including greater collaboration among nonprofits, civility, diversity, high energy, respectful communication, and specific projects such as a community ice skating rink, live theater, arts district, museum, and housing, which to no one's surprise also turned up as an obstacle. Dollar signs were everywhere, seemingly pointing to unaffordability of both living and working here, in certain sectors. No idea was unworthy; no obstacle was dismissed as too high. All were considered.

Three people advocated on behalf of a new local theater group looking for funding and a performance space. They've presented theater on a small scale, and they are looking to grow, especially to include more youth and adults.

Representatives of the Sisters Rodeo and Sisters Folk Festival talked about the

success and stability of their organizations, and offered ongoing help to the arts and theater contingent.

Barros commented, "During the reception at Sisters Galley and Frame, we heard from Ford Leadership graduates, nonprofits, and the arts community about opportunities and challenges and we were happy to hear that these groups want to continue to meet to address the challenges and move the opportunities forward."

The Ford Family Foundation recently provided funding for Speak Your Peace: the Civility Project. In January, speaker Rob Karwath introduced fundamental principles of civility, and facilitated discussions on how Sisters can adopt, customize and use these principles to enhance community interaction. C4C President Robyn Holdman represented local Citizens4Community at the meeting, and later said, "We are working on building our team and we appreciated their support."

Later that evening, Barros and Thompson dropped in on the Sisters City Council, where Barros explained the nature of their visit, and asked and answered questions. One of the ongoing concerns mentioned was affordable housing, but the FFF does not deal directly with that.

"We can provide funds for technical assistance," Barros said. But the foundation does not directly help with housing development.

Barros told the Council it's important for the foundation

to start at where the community is, rather than coming in with a pre-packaged program. There is no "one-size-fits-all," so what worked for Coburg or Damascus is not the same as what will work in Sisters. In Coburg, some foundation graduates were interested in building a community center, but with the help of the foundation, they discovered it would be more effective to renovate an existing building. In Damascus, a need was met by turning the old fire hall into a community center. In Sisters, much of the preliminary work — in terms of convening focus groups to identify needs — has already been done.

In a true effort to listen to citizens who don't usually get heard, Barros and Thompson met with a small group at Hardtails Bar & Grill, and sat down over coffee for nearly two hours with a Hispanic woman. They represented some of the points of view that otherwise may not be heard.

It was not all work and no play for the team. Thursday evening, they took in a packed-house concert by Darlingside, and saw how much Sisters loves music. Barros loved it.

"The concert was amazing, and what a delight to have such an amazing performance at the high school. The band members felt like they were at home and talked so warmly about their experiences in Sisters."

Asked what surprised him most about Sisters, Barros described a casual meeting: "I went for a walk Friday morning, and walked into the Gallery Restaurant for breakfast, and saw Lance, whom I had met for the first time on Thursday, sitting at the counter having breakfast, and he invited me to sit with him. It speaks volumes about how friendly the people of Sisters are and how welcome they make you feel."

*Sue Stafford contributed to this story.*

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