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“Ahrens Foundation creativity wins national attention”

The Council on foundations, an international organization composed of foundations from around the world, has honored leaders in the field of philanthropy through its Critical Impact Awards for more than 20 years. The council recently announced that the recipient of the 2010 family foundation award is the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation headquartered in Grinnell. Julie Gosselink, president and chief executive officer of the foundation, will accept the award at the Council’s Family Philanthropy Conference Feb. 2 in San Diego.

The Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation is being honored for the Community Support Services program it operates in the Grinnell area. The Community Support Services program aims to build capacity and promote collaboration among the local nonprofit community by optimizing back office support operations and to create efficiencies through shared staff and administrative functions. The program allows the organizations with which it collaborates to focus on organizational goals rather than the details of administration, strengthening work toward the missions of the nonprofits it serves and allowing them to improve the quality of life for their communities more efficiently.

“We are extremely honored to receive this award,” Gosselink says. “To be recognized by the Council on Foundations and among our national peer foundations is extraordinary.”

“Our community Support Services program was designed to positively impact our nonprofit community on a local scale, but our story and unique business model among the foundation and nonprofit sector has evolved onto the national scene,” Gosselink continues. “We are attracting not only the attention of the Council on Foundations but presently many other national organizations and foundations as well which is pretty incredible.”

“Collaboration is an effective tool to increase the impact of one’s giving. Today with the increasing partnerships between the public, private, and philanthropic sectors, the Ahrens Foundation is setting a standard for promoting such collaboration while also enhancing efficiency and impact,” said Steve Gunderson, president and CEO of the Council on Foundations.

The Critical Impact Award was created in 2006 by Gunderson to honor grantmakers who have supported innovative leadership, bold visions and significant impact in advancing the common good through effective grantmaking which can serve as a model for others in philanthropy.

The award will be presented to the Ahrens Foundation during the Council’s Family Philanthropy Conference in San Diego entitled “Sea Change: Redefining Family Philanthropy,” to be held Jan. 31 to Feb. 2. The award ceremony will occur during the breakfast plenary session on Tuesday, Feb. 2.

The Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation was established in 1993 by Claude Ahrens who served as the first chair of the organization’s board. Gosselink who now serves as chair is also the first employee of the foundation, serving as president and chief executive officer for the past ten years. Shannon Fitzgerald, board secretary and treasurer, became the second employee five years ago as chief fiscal officer and controller. Susan Witt serves as board vice-president, and David Clay and Chad Ahrens serve as board members. Melissa Hull is employed as the administrative assistant, and two part-time employees round out the staff.

The foundation built its headquarters on Penrose Street in eastern Grinnell in 2006. Gosselink operated the foundation from her home prior to that date. The organizations to which the foundation provides its community support services, often termed “back-office” support, are the Ahrens Park Foundation, Communities for Literate Iowa Kids (CLIK), Community Education Council, Drake Community Library capital campaign, Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation, Grinnell Mutual Aquatic Center capital campaign, Grinnell High School Alumni Association, Grinnell High School capital campaign expansion, Grinnell- Newburg Dollars for Scholars, Grinnell-Newburg Educational Excellence, Imagine Grinnell, Iowa Transportation Museum endowment, Kids Against Hunger, and Poweshiek County Empowerment.

The Council on Foundations, formed in 1949, is a nonprofit membership association of grantmaking foundations and corporations. Members of the council include approximately 2,000 independent, operating, community, public and company-sponsored foundations and corporate giving programs in the United States and abroad. The assets of council members total more than \$307 billion. The council’s mission is to provide the opportunity, leadership, and tools needed by philanthropic organizations to expand, enhance, and sustain their ability to advance the common good. For more information, visit the Council’s Web site at www.cof.org.