

Continuing Impact:

Howard Bowers Fund supports co-op education and training

BY MARY BYRNE

About the Fund:

Guided by the fifth and sixth cooperative principles to promote education, training, and cooperation among cooperatives, the Howard Bowers Fund invests in the professional growth and development of food cooperative staff and board members. In an environment where resources are often lacking to propel cooperatives to advanced stages of growth and development, the Howard Bowers Fund helps bridge funding gaps for training to improve cooperative business.

Since 1994, the Bowers Fund has provided \$475,000 in grants, offering the kind of support food co-ops need to open strong and stay competitive: assistance with staff and board training and scholarships to attend professional conferences that allow them to network with peers and learn from industry experts.

The Fund at work in 2016:

In 2016, the Howard Bowers Fund granted 20 scholarships for participation in the Consumer Cooperative Management Association Conference, “Disrupting the Future: Cooperative Food and the Next Generation.” Nineteen food cooperatives received grants for board and staff training last year, and the Fund provided \$68,000 in sponsorships and scholarships.

The Fund provided support for the Small and Strong Conference in Bloomington, Minnesota, which held educational sessions for both existing and start-up cooperatives on governance, marketing, and operations. The conference benefitted Upper Midwest food cooperatives with strategies for improving merchandising, staff management, and regional collaboration.

Additionally, the Fund supported the fast-growing Up and Coming



Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a series of workshops for startups on topics such as the evaluation of operational performance indicators and developing relationships with lenders.

Paying it forward:

The Bowers Fund also creates opportunities for mature food cooperatives to pay their successes forward by supporting scholarships for trainings and education through the Fund, demonstrating their commitment to the fifth and sixth cooperative principles: education, training, and information and cooperating among cooperatives.

2017 fundraising campaign:

The 2017 fundraising campaign for the Bowers Fund has just begun and will run through October. Already we have exceeded last year's efforts by raising \$17,500 at CCMA in June—where the family of Howard Bowers generously donated an Apple watch for auction at the conference.

Display a Bowers Fund quilt:

The campaign this year has a special incentive to co-ops who are leaders in supporting the Fund: The first five to donate \$500 or more will be invited to host one of our co-op quilts for two months in 2017. Many co-ops hang the quilts in their stores as a reminder of the strength of the food cooperative movement and their co-op's commitment to the cooperative principles. Willy Street Co-op in Madison, Wisconsin, has already become a quilt winner with an early and very generous donation.

Making a donation:

To donate online, supporters can go to our website, cdf.coop/bowersfund. Or, checks may be written to the Cooperative Development Foundation with the Howard Bowers Fund referenced in the memo line. □

“The work goes on”

From remarks by Maureen Bowers, daughter-in-law of Howard Bowers and newest board member of the Howard Bowers Fund, at the 2017 CCMA conference:

Howard Bowers was a smart man, he was a kind man, he was a generous man, he was a man

of great integrity. Our family is so proud to have his name attached to this Fund, although I also know that that would be less important to him than the fact that there is a Fund, and the work goes on: that there are co-ops being started, that there are co-ops that are get-

ting stronger, and that there are co-ops that are being sustained because of the work that all of you do—and hopefully with the help of the Howard Bowers Fund.

The Bowers Fund helps both established co-ops and startup co-ops. Established co-ops need

training and assistance in times of increased competition and economic challenges, as well as in times of growth and expansion. Startups need training at all stages to ensure that a strong foundation is established for operating and governing success.