

(From a Grand Rapids Community Foundations news release)

February 19, 2010 -- When Grand Rapids Community Foundation renovated its building at 185 Oakes Street SW, the plan was to find a piece of art that exemplified the work of the organization and would help tell its story. To that end, the Community Foundation commissioned artist Ed Wong-Ligda to create a painting. The 6x13 foot oil on canvas painting has been installed at the Community Foundation building. It took Wong-Ligda, who is a professor of art at Grand Valley State University, 18 months to complete the painting. "Ed researched our history and talked with some of our current donors and grantees to get the full scope of who we are and what we do," said Diana Sieger, president of Grand Rapids Community Foundation. "His interview information is present in the details of the painting."

Wong-Ligda chose to tell Grand Rapids Community Foundation's story with a community garden theme. The garden, which is based on the garden in the Hillcrest neighborhood, illustrates three simple concepts - gifts, growth and grants. It shows three seasons of a garden, with spring at the right with the soil being prepared and seeds (gifts) being planted; the center shows the summer with plants producing vegetables and flowers blooming (growth) and the left shows the harvest (grants) and composting. The concept for the painting was created by one of Wong-Ligda's assistants, Kaylee Cornfield.

"One of the features that attracted us to Ed's work is that he's excellent at showing a diversity of people-age, gender, ethnicity and overall facial and body characteristics. We also appreciated his imaginative allegorical skills. His figures and objects stand for abstract ideas or deeper symbols," said Sieger.

The metaphor of a community garden shows people working together to create something significant for the future; this idea reinforces the concept that the Community Foundation is centered on growth, prosperity, neighborhoods, health and diversity. There are many children in the painting, all actively working in the garden. The children represent the concept of sustainability, each learning skills for the future. Some of the plants in the painting are medicinal which relates to Grand Rapids Community Foundation's founder Lee Hutchins who worked in the pharmaceutical business. Other plants shown are traditionally used in ethnic cooking which correlates to the ethnic diversity of the people in the painting. Hutchins is featured in the center of the painting, near a large oak tree which is a symbol of Grand Rapids Community Foundation's deep roots in the community. Hutchins is accepting a bouquet of flowers from a girl in a ballet skirt. The dancer denotes the arts and flower bouquet represents the arts community acknowledging the Community Foundation for its support.