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Impact 100 creates its mark in Westchester

By SUSAN WOLFERT

With a quest to bring the issue of local philanthropy to the forefront, five Edgemont women established a nonprofit foundation based on a collective giving model last year. The Impact 100 board then sought 100 women to donate \$1,000 each to enable a gift of \$100,000 to a Westchester-based organization in need.

One year and 132 members later, Impact 100 has more than made its mark. At its first annual meeting June 13, the foundation members voted to award \$100,000 to Furniture Sharehouse, an organization that provides free furniture to Westchester families in need. The grant will enable Furniture Sharehouse to purchase and operate a truck that will greatly expand its ability to accept, store and deliver furniture donations. The remaining \$32,000 raised by Impact 100 was divided among the three other finalist organizations: Clay Arts Center, Something Good in the World and Yonkers Partners in Education.

Impact 100 president Sharon Douglas said, "We are delighted that Furniture Sharehouse is the winner of our first \$100,000 transformational grant. We know that the new truck will improve operations and help transform the lives of many families within Westchester County."

At the Impact 100 launch party last year, Douglas noted Westchester is a "county of wealth and poverty" and said the group hoped to address local needs such as hunger, homelessness and low high school graduation rates among others. "I cannot live the life I live and know that five miles in any direction from my house, there is tremendous need," Douglas said. The initial Impact 100 board included



The Executive Board of Impact100 Westchester awards Furniture Sharehouse its prize. From left to right: Sharon Douglas, Eileen Weinstein, Kate Bialo of Furniture Sharehouse, Donna Seife, Anita Borkenstein, Nancy Stuzin.

Douglas as well as Edgemont residents Anita Borkenstein, Nancy Stuzin, Eileen Weinstein and former Edgemont resident Donna Seife.

Within six months of its launch, Impact 100 exceeded its 100-member goal and in January began seeking grant proposals in the areas of arts and culture, education, health and wellness, and the environment. Members volunteered to join committees in these areas to evaluate proposals, go on site visits, pore over financial statements and propose a finalist. Potential grantees were required to have been in existence for at least three years and demonstrate they had the ability to maintain a funded project going forward. Requests for operating funds, grants for projects outside the county, or funding for religious, partisan, legislative or political activities were not considered.

Seife told the Inquirer that roughly half of the members served on a committee and donated significant time to evalu-

ating proposals and performing financial due diligence. The foundation received a total of 55 grant requests. "All the proposals were compelling. We would have been thrilled with any of them," said Seife.

Furniture Sharehouse collects donated furniture and stores it in a rented warehouse located at Westchester Airport. The foundation then gives the furniture free of charge to people who are transitioning from homeless shelters to their own homes, fleeing abusive situations, aging out of foster care or recovering from disasters.

The foundation began operations in 2007 and, according to its founder and executive director Kate Bialo, has given over 41,000 items of furniture with a thrift shop value of \$2.5 million to over 7,700 individuals in its seven years. Bialo said she is "over the moon" about the Impact 100 grant and is excited to go truck shopping. The organization is managed by a nine-member volunteer board.

The Impact 100 grant will enable Furniture Sharehouse to purchase the truck and operate and maintain it for one year. Bialo estimates that trucking constitutes one-third of the organization's overall expenses. The truck, expected to be on the road later this summer, will sport the Furniture Sharehouse and Impact 100 logos. "It's a billboard on wheels," said Bialo.

Furniture Sharehouse serves approximately 10 Westchester residents per week who leave the storage facility with a full home set-up. Bialo said, "We give them enough furniture to transform an empty apartment to a comfortable home. People's lives are being transformed on the spot." She added the Impact 100 grant "will allow us to give even more families a fresh start and help them rebuild their lives."

Going forward, Impact 100 hopes to grow its membership and its board to include residents and project proposals from all over Westchester County. At the annual meeting, Edgemont resident Susan Newman was named to the board.

Seife told the Inquirer the foundation was enormously gratified by its first year success and noted that it had operating funds left over to kick off its second year. All of the member donations go to grant recipients and "Friend" donations fund operating expenses. Board members serve on a volunteer basis.

Reflecting on the inaugural year, Douglas said, "Together, as women we are empowering other women and making a difference in our neighbors' lives."

Further information about Impact 100 can be accessed at www.impact100westchester.org and about Furniture Sharehouse at www.furnituresharehouse.org.