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Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation awards \$150,000 to improve parks and recreation facilities in Mercer County, Illinois

Collaborations and projects inspired by Mercer County Better Together countywide strategic plan

MERCER COUNTY, Illinois—Trustees of the Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation have awarded \$150,000 to eleven groups across Mercer County, Illinois, to improve parks and recreation facilities for the people of Mercer County, and all who enjoy these outdoor spaces.

The grants are made possible thanks to the generosity of Dorothy Looser Flake and Roberta Looser, sisters who were born and raised on a family farm near New Boston Township, Illinois. They cared deeply about the community that gave them so much growing up that they left a portion of their estates to establish the Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to Mercer County.

Their wish was to encourage the community, through creativity and collaboration, to find ways to advance local education, culture, and economic development in Mercer County. The adoption of a countywide strategic plan through Mercer County Better Together would have been fully embraced by the two siblings, said trustee John Slover, making this grant program a perfect match for the charitable foundation.

“Dorothy and Roberta would be so happy to see the collaborations happening in Mercer County today,” Slover said. “And this grant program was, simply, a home run. The work of Mercer County Better Together is exactly the type of collaboration we need in the county to enhance the quality of life for all who live and work here—and come to enjoy our parks and recreational amenities. We are grateful for all those involved in Mercer County Better Together for their energy and passion for our community.”

The grant opportunity encouraged municipalities in the county to create and submit one collaborative application that would support at least eight communities. The opportunity was developed—and informed—by the priorities identified by the people of Mercer County through the Mercer County Better Together initiative.

“This succeeded our wildest expectations,” Slover said, “because it brought communities of varying size together to cooperatively work together to create a vision for our parks and recreational facilities. The

group also brought more than \$100,000 in matching funds that the group decided to share credit for — from Eliza to North Henderson, New Windsor to Keithsburg, and many in between.”

In addition, representatives from every participating municipality voluntarily adjusted the amount requested for their projects so that every community engaged in the grant process would be able to turn their vision into a reality. The following eleven projects have been funded:

- The City of Aledo will construct a new varsity baseball diamond at Northside Park.
- The City of Keithsburg will pour seven new concrete pads at Riverside Campground.
- The Eliza Township will build a permanent restroom facility at their ball diamond.
- The Mercer County Agricultural Society will repair the roof of the Merchant Building at the Mercer County Fairgrounds.
- The Mercer County YMCA will complete renderings for a building expansion study.
- The Village of Joy will improve the playground in Joy Park.
- The Village of Matherville will pave a boat ramp and install a dock for kayak use at Lake Matherville.
- The Village of New Windsor will upgrade the basketball courts in town.
- The Village of North Henderson will install wheelchair-accessible park equipment.
- The Village of Seaton will improve lighting in Seaton Park.
- The Village of Viola will install new playground equipment at Miles Memorial Park.

Kyle McEwen, executive director of Mercer County Better Together, said the grants will allow communities to enhance some of the county’s most valuable assets. “These facilities represent recreation opportunities, provide for improved community health, create multigenerational engagement, and in many cases, represent centers of our community,” said McEwen. “By sharing an interest in collaborative success, participants showcased the strength of Mercer County as a unified community.”

The \$150,000 in grants awarded to eleven projects in nine communities is on top of more than \$200,000 in additional support recently provided by the Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation across the region, supporting scholarships for Mercer County students at Black Hawk College and Western Illinois University; technological improvements in the Mercer County and Sherrard School Districts, and providing funds that helped to secure hundreds of thousands of dollars in state funding for improvements to the campground in the City of New Boston.

Kelly Thompson, the administrator for the charitable foundation, said that she believes the collaborations sparked through Mercer County Better Together and this grant opportunity will inspire further partnerships in Mercer County—and across the region—down the road. “When we come together like the people of Mercer County did to better our communities through shared planning and action, the opportunity for transformation is doubled. We are excited to watch these projects unfold—and see what the people of Mercer County dream up in the future.”

To learn more about the Looser-Flake Charitable Foundation, a private foundation administered through support from the Quad Cities Community Foundation, visit www.looserflakefoundation.org.

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NOTE TO REPORTERS: Interviews with community members who participated in the grant application process can be arranged by contacting Kyle McEwen at kyle@mcbettertogether.org or (309) 574-3123.