Wean Foundation Awards Grants at Summer Meeting

(June 3, 2016, Warren, Ohio) – The Raymond John Wean Foundation approved grants totaling nearly $729,400 at its June meeting to organizations committed to its strategic priorities of community revitalization and educational opportunity, including early childhood (0-5). Funding included $115,000 for Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which along with Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership (TNP) and Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation (YNDC), will support the education of residents in tree stewarding practices and enhance technology for an accurate accounting of the housing stock. The work will utilize the previous property inventories of the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative, TNP and YNDC.

Jennifer Roller, president of The Raymond John Wean Foundation, stated sharing information and growing local skill sets is a great use of resources. “The success of the Land Conservancy, along with the local partner’s capacity to impact change, makes aligning these organizations an obvious choice. It’s consistent with the Foundation’s priority to promote a “spirit of collaboration” and will increase the long-term sustainability of the Valley’s neighborhood revitalization work,” she said.

Towards these efforts, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress was awarded $20,000 in support of a study that seeks to understand and thus compare the impact of residential rehabilitation to demolition in strengthening neighborhood revitalization.

Educational grants demonstrating the Foundation’s continued support to achieve school, college and career readiness:

- Eastern Ohio Education Partnership – $200,000 a year for two years to strengthen the organization which seeks to
serve as the center of community collaboration around education.

- **Inspiring Minds** — $75,000 a year for two years for its After-school and College & Career Readiness Warren programming for 8th – 12th grade students.
- **Invent Now, Inc.** — $13,750 to provide full scholarships for 50 Youngstown Chaney middle school students to participate in its Invention Project STEM program.
- **Warren City School District** — $30,649 to build on the success of its 2015 pilot that transitions students from primary to intermediate grades and middle to high school with intentional year-long engagement of both youth and their families.

**June 2016 Grant Awards**

**Eastern Ohio Education Partnership**
Collective Impact Around Education $400,000 over two years

**Inspiring Minds**
College & Readiness Component of Enrichment Program $150,000 over two years

**Invent Now, Inc.**
Invention Project: Middle School STEM Program for $13,750

**Mahoning County Youth Neighborhood Progress, Inc., dba Cleveland Neighborhood Progress**
Supporting Research to Test Impacts of Residential Rehabilitation Programs on Home Equity and Mortgage Foreclosure Rates

**Warren City School District**
Effective Transitions to Improve Student Success: Year Two $30,649

**Western Reserve Land Conservancy**
Property Inventory and Reforestation Training for $115,000
Established Mahoning Valley Community Organizations

Mahoning Valley-based Funders Join Fund for Our Economic Future to Support Efforts that Result in Both Growth and Opportunity

(May 31, 2016, Warren, Ohio) – The Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley, Trumbull 100, and The Youngstown Foundation are pleased to announce a joint commitment of $100,000 over three years to the Fund for Our Economic Future (the Fund), an alliance of funders dedicated to advancing both economic growth and increased access to opportunity for all residents of Northeast Ohio. Each organization will provide 1/3rd of the total commitment for a shared voting membership in the Fund.

The Trumbull 100 has been a part of the Fund since 2009, while the Community Foundation is a past funder and The Youngstown Foundation is new to the Fund. These funders join The Raymond John Wean Foundation, which renewed its Fund membership in March with a $100,000 commitment over three years, as Fund members representing the Mahoning Valley. Jan Strasfeld, Executive Director of The Youngstown Foundation stated, “We welcome this opportunity to expand local representation in Fund discussions and direction to further strengthen development of our region’s economic competitiveness.”
Founded in 2004, the Fund is a nonprofit member-driven organization that today consists of 50 funders—foundations, corporations, universities, health care systems, business and civic associations, government entities, and individuals—from across Northeast Ohio who pool their resources and collective know-how to improve the region’s economic competitiveness through strategies that advance job creation, job preparation and job access.

Voting members contribute a minimum of $100,000 over three years, with several members contributing much more than that. Since its founding, the Fund has honored a “one member, one vote” policy for voting members, to assure that smaller foundations have a strong voice. Each voting member serves on the Fund’s board. “Strong Valley representation in the Fund is important,” said Shari Harrell, president of the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley. “Collectively, we can bring a strong voice to this regional table of heavy hitters and ensure the issues that affect our residents’ wellbeing are addressed.”

In return, the Mahoning Valley-based members of the Fund receive access to resources, learning opportunities and new connections to help support local efforts in the community. For instance, the Fund recently approved a grant of up to $20,000 to support the Tech Belt Energy Innovation Center in Warren.

The Fund also supported the national WorkAdvance pilot in the Mahoning Valley. WorkAdvance tested how a seamless set of services, with an added focus on post-employment assistance, can better connect disadvantaged job seekers to in-demand jobs and put them on a path toward career advancement, while helping employers find the talent they need for their businesses to prosper.

Already, learnings from this demonstration are being adopted
in the Valley and Fund members there are particularly keen on continuing to build on these lessons.

“The Fund provides ample opportunities for learning and connecting with those across Northeast Ohio who share a similar vision for a great community,” said Jennifer Roller, president of The Raymond John Wean Foundation. “At the Wean Foundation, we are putting those connections, particularly as they relate to workforce development, to good use in the Mahoning Valley.”

About Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley

The Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley, established in 2000, enhances the quality of life for residents and future generations of the Mahoning Valley by managing donor assets, distributing grants and advancing philanthropy and good works. The Foundation and its affiliates hold nearly $54 million in assets and distributed more than $2 million in grants in 2015. It is the only local foundation with certification from the Community Foundation National Standards Board. More information is available at the foundation’s website, www.cfmv.org.

About Fund for Our Economic Future

The Fund for Our Economic Future is an alliance of funders—foundations, corporations, universities, health care systems, business and civic associations, government entities, and individuals—who pool their resources and collective know-how to advance economic growth and increase access to opportunity for the people of Northeast Ohio through improved job creation, job preparation and job access, an approach we call Growth & Opportunity. We do this by building shared community commitment, supporting high-impact collaborations and marshalling strategic funding. Since our founding in 2004, the Fund has raised more than $100 million for improving regional economic competitiveness. Our efforts have helped
retain or create more than 18,500 jobs, add $760 million in payroll, and attract $4 billion in capital to Northeast Ohio.

**About The Raymond John Wean Foundation**

Raymond John Wean, after having achieved success in the flat-rolled steel processing industry, in 1949 created the Foundation that bears his name in Warren. Since then, more than $100 million in grants have been awarded to a broad variety of nonprofit organizations in support of its vision to empower residents to create a healthy, vibrant, equitable and economically stable Mahoning Valley. To achieve greater impact, the Foundation leverages a powerful combination of support, alignment and partnerships among programs, organizations and efforts in the strategic priorities of community revitalization, economic opportunity and educational opportunity, including early childhood (0-5) and public service leadership. The Foundation recognizes that our community is best served when diverse organizations and constituencies come together and share their knowledge, resources and experiences to address issues and opportunities.

**About The Youngstown Foundation**

Founded in 1918, the Youngstown Foundation is the 4th oldest in the world. Its mission is to provide financial assistance to charitable, scientific and educational institutions that promote the mental, moral and physical well-being of the inhabitants of Youngstown and vicinity. The Youngstown Foundation is the largest community foundation in the Mahoning Valley with over $110,000 million in assets and is among the largest grantmakers in Northeast Ohio. More than $6M was distributed in 2015 representing more than 200 grants awarded to local nonprofit organizations. In addition to its unrestricted fund, The Youngstown Foundation is composed of over 65 Donor Advised Funds, Restricted Funds and Special Interest Funds.
About Trumbull 100

Trumbull 100’s mission is to embrace and facilitate opportunities by providing resources and leadership to projects that enhance the quality of life of its residents. Founded in 1994, the group is composed of business and civic leaders who are engaged locally and regionally in identifying and developing projects and opportunities that meet the goals and mission of the organization.

The Raymond John Wean Foundation Hosts Valley-Wide Reception; Emerging Leaders Celebrate Achievements

(May 18, 2016, Warren, OH) – On Tuesday, May 17, the Valley’s community stakeholders gathered at The Soap Gallery in downtown Youngstown to celebrate the completion of The Raymond John Wean Foundation’s 2016 Emerging Leaders program. Twenty residents from Warren and Youngstown participated in the nine-week experience designed to leverage their unique assets and cultivate fundamental leadership skills.

“The 2016 Emerging Leaders are a microcosm of our community, they represent the rich diversity of our community and exemplify inclusive and collaborative leadership. The impact created by the Emerging Leaders and their respective organizations will be tremendous,” commented Corrie Adams, Emerging Leader Liaison.
The nine-week leadership experience commenced with a two-day retreat in April, followed by sessions facilitated by notable researchers/practitioners covering topics such as communication and negotiation, decision-making, strategic partnerships, driving change and managing conflict and resilience.

When asked to reflect on the program’s value, 2016 Emerging Leader, Louise Hayes, commented, “The program is a wonderful asset to the community by giving people an opportunity to develop skills and gain tools of leadership. It’s well worth the effort!”

Greg Davner of St. Patrick’s Church in Youngstown summed up his overall experience stating, “I feel empowered. I now know I can take the skills I’ve been taught and not only be a leader myself, but pass these incredible truths on to those in my circle of influence.”

Tuesday’s “Launch Party” provided a networking opportunity to spark meaningful dialogue between the group and current Mahoning Valley leadership regarding future engagement opportunities. “Networking is a powerful strength of the Emerging Leaders program. Sharing common challenges and solutions reinforces that I am not alone in this journey,” stated participant Meredith Chaplin.

Alumni from past cohorts continue to be connected to the program by participating in various roles including conversation facilitators and peer mentors. Utilizing skillsets and relationships from the Emerging Leaders program, they’ve continued into new job opportunities, including promotions; participation in additional training; civic engagement and volunteerism; public leadership appointments; and entrepreneurial programs.

Congratulations to the 2016 Emerging Leaders Cohort:
Amy Best, Youngstown  
Christina Campbell, Warren  
Meredith Chaplin, Warren  
Nicholas Chretien, Youngstown  
Deborah Cunningham, Youngstown  
Greg Davner, Youngstown  
Lynn Dean, Youngstown  
DeAudra Edgerson, Warren  
Jessica Gaskell, Warren  
Adam Gregory, Warren  
Louise Hayes, Youngstown  
Tamisha Howard, Warren  
Lauren Johnson, Youngstown  
Miles Johnson, Warren  
David Lomax, Youngstown  
Kassey Nall, Youngstown  
Meghan Reed, Warren  
Kia Rucker, Warren  
Towana Stevens, Youngstown  
Brandi Takas, Youngstown

To learn more about the Foundation’s Emerging Leaders and Leadership programs, visit www.riweanfdn.org.

Mahoning Valley Residents Selected for Wean Foundation’s 2016 Emerging
Leaders Cohort

(Warren, April 6, 2016) – Twenty residents from Warren and Youngstown have been chosen as the 2016 cohort for the Emerging Leaders program at The Raymond John Wean Foundation.

This group of grassroots leaders will take part in a nine-week series of comprehensive workshops designed to cultivate fundamental leadership skills, as well as connect individuals to key community peers and stakeholders.

“It’s a different approach to exploring active leadership and networking,” said Corrie Adams, Emergent Leader Liaison. “And it’s practical because everyone, not only those in executive, decision-making positions, can be an effective change agent by practicing the ethos of leadership in their everyday actions.”

This year’s cohort includes individuals representing a wide range of organizations, from Upward Bound and YSUscape at Youngstown State University, to Trumbull County Take Flight and the Taft Promise Neighborhood Initiative for AmeriCorps VISTA. Coming together from all corners of the Mahoning Valley, these passionate individuals share a common goal of building their capacity for realized change.

David Lomax, a retiring police officer in Youngstown and one of this year’s participants, wants to develop his leadership skills to promote awareness and prevention of male violence against women, which has been his focus throughout his career.

“I want to take this cause to the community, and I need help to get it to that level,” Lomax said, “to be able to get in front of people, judges, doctors, lawyers and talk to them about the importance of violence prevention and intervention.”

Jessica Gaskell of Warren also recognizes the crucial networking component to the Emerging Leaders program, and she hopes it will benefit her as a district executive for the Boy
“It’s a nonprofit organization, so networking is a huge part of what I do for fundraising and building community partnerships,” said Gaskell. “The biggest skill I want to work on is my assertiveness, and I think that being in a program like this and putting myself out there will really help that.”

After a two-day retreat in April focused on exploring personal leading styles, participants will experience seven workshop sessions facilitated by notable researcher/practitioners including topics such as communication and negotiation, decision-making, strategic partnerships, resource planning and mindfulness. The program culminates with a launch party in May, where participants showcase their work to Valley stakeholders.

Since 2013, the Emerging Leaders program has developed the unique potential of resident leaders to effect long-term changes and create pathways to more involvement in community decision-making processes. Past participants continue to gain and share their experience through job opportunities, including promotions; participation in additional training; civic engagement and volunteerism; public leadership appointments; and entrepreneurial programs.

This year’s group of passionate Valley change-makers are poised to make significant differences in their communities as well. The Raymond John Wean Foundation is proud to announce the 2016 Emerging Leaders:

Amy Best, Youngstown
Christina Campbell, Warren
Meredith Chaplin, Warren
Nicholas Chretien, Youngstown
Deborah Cunningham, Youngstown
Greg Davner, Youngstown
Lynn Dean, Youngstown
The Raymond John Wean Foundation Awards Nearly $140,000 in Grants

(March 4, 2016, Warren, Ohio) The Board of Directors of The Raymond John Wean Foundation awarded grants totaling nearly $140,000 for programs seeking to promote financial stability; create better opportunities for academic success; and support the collaborative efforts of public and private partnerships.

The East Side Organizing Project was granted $30,000 in support of its “Senior Financial Empowerment Initiative,” which offers financial workshops and outreach for low-to-moderate income senior citizens. Through an integrated suite of financial education and capabilities programs, its goal is to increase the stability of the Valley’s growing senior population (age 55 or older) towards obtaining a more secure
financial future.

Warren City School District was awarded $25,000 to increase the leadership capacity of its building principals, improve the teaching and learning of the district’s youngest learners and establish a system of meaningful data collection as it relates to early learning and leadership. To do so, the district will engage the CAYL Institute to facilitate its “Accelerating Change: Learning for High Quality Early Learning” training program.

The Center for Student Progress Summer Bridge program at Youngstown State University was awarded $20,000 over two years to provide information and support to minority students so that they can successfully progress throughout college and ultimately become graduates. The one-week intensive orientation familiarizes participants with academic and social experiences most often encountered by first-year students.

“This support allows the program to enrich its curriculum and prepare students for the rigors of college. It will also help us to build stronger ties to the other educational stakeholders the Foundation supports in order to help create a better educated Mahoning Valley,” shared Michael Beverly, Program Director of Summer Bridge.

The Wean directors also awarded a shared $64,910 for the second year of We Are Warren, a collaborative initiative created to coordinate and support efforts regarding youth development and family engagement in the community. Warren City School District will work closely with Eastern Ohio Education Partnership to develop a fully functioning portal site which identifies nonprofits in the city that are performing work related to the educational pipeline, from preschool to postsecondary. Inspiring Minds, in support of We Are Warren, will partner with the school district to expand programming and opportunities for Warren students in the after-school setting.
March 2016 Grant Awards

East Side Organizing Project
Senior Financial Empowerment Initiative $30,000

Eastern Ohio Education Partnership
We are Warren: Year 2 $4,910

Inspiring Minds
We are Warren: Year 2 $35,000

Warren City School District
Accelerating Change: Leadership for High Quality Early Learning $25,000

Warren City School District
We Are Warren: Year 2 $25,000

Youngstown State University
Summer Bridge 2016 / Summer Bridge 2017 $20,000 over two years

Wean Foundation Awards $143,000 to 43 Different Warren and Youngstown Groups

(March 1, 2016, Warren, Ohio) – Guided by its Resident Council, The Raymond John Wean Foundation awarded over $143,000 to 43 organizations led by residents working to transform their neighborhoods and communities.

The funds were awarded as part of Neighborhood SUCCESS, an 8 year-old Wean Foundation program that supports a wide range of projects with an intentional focus on encouraging, cultivating
and supporting resident engagement and leadership development.

“From a project that mentors high school athletes in Mahoning and Trumbull counties to one that fosters greater engagement in Youngstown neighborhoods, the Neighborhood SUCCESS program enthusiastically supports grassroots initiatives that are working to address challenges or create opportunities for residents,” said Teresa Furniss, 2015-16 Resident Council member.

Among the 2016 grantees is the Friends of the Warren Heritage Center. With its $1,058 award, the group will develop and take to various locations a portable, three-dimensional display reflecting a “Black History Timeline” as it relates to the City of Warren. Its focus will be to highlight events, “firsts” and fascinating stories from the community’s rich history.

In Youngstown, the 6th Ward Citizens Coalition was granted $3,100 for its community mobilization event series to build a greater sense of well-being in the neighborhood. Events will include a Safety Summit, Health Day and Neighborhood Harvest Festival.

Grassroots groups in Warren and Youngstown began their funding journey back in late October, participating in grantseeker workshops, technical assistance sessions, interviews and orientation meetings.

Since 2008, Wean has funded $1.3 million in Neighborhood SUCCESS projects to more than 400 different organizations in the Valley.

“I believe there is a growing awareness and understanding of the importance of civic engagement in the Mahoning Valley. This program is a great tool for encouraging that,” said Jennifer Roller, President of The Raymond John Wean Foundation. “We know that healthy communities have engaged residents.”
The Raymond John Wean Foundation
2016 Neighborhood SUCCESS Grant Awards

2017 Willard Lot C.A.B.L.E. 5,000
4 Square Block Watch New Beginning Neighborhood Beautification 2,110
6th Ward Citizens Coalition Community Mobilization Event Series 3,100
Boulevard Park Block Watch Beautiful Boulevards of Rush and Euclid 4,975
Central City Neighborhood Association Central City Unity Garden & Pocket Park 4,507
Citizens Uniting Citizens Project Family Ties 3,064
Community Volunteer Council Pantry Cooking 101 1,630
Crandall Park North Neighborhood Association Crandall Park Improvement Project 2,127
Dandee’s Lion of the Field Ministry Blossoming Dandies 793
Earth Angel Farm Urban Farm Cooperative Project 2,948
Economic Justice Team Bus Stop 3,350
Friends of the Mahoning River 5th Annual Mahoning River Fest 2,395
Friends of the Warren Heritage Center Black History Timeline 1,058
Game Changers Leadership and Peer Mentoring Initiative 2016 Leadership Empowerment Day 2,830
Garfield Community Garden All Ages Community Involvement 2,900
Heart Reach Ministries, Inc. Adopt A Block Operation Restoration 2,830
Historic Perkins Homestead Neighborhood Assoc. Perkins Rose Garden Revitalization 4,069
Just Because Children’s Fun and Health Fair 3,285
Lit Youngstown Youngstown Stories 2,600
Mahoning Commons Association Mahoning Avenue Corridor Public Art Project 4,740
Mahoning Valley Sojourn to the Past, The Sojourn to the Past 5,000
Martin Luther Lutheran Church Hope for Newport Community
Garden 3,225
Neighborhood Ministries Rockford Health and Fitness 4,000
Northeast Homeowners and Concerned Citizens Association
McGuffey Road Neighborhood Pocket Park Beautification Project 5,000
Pointview Children and Families Garden Dirt, till, watering
systems, and shed 3,430
Popcorn, Cookies, and Jazz (PC&J) PC&J Annual Afternoon in
Crandall Park 3,075
Quilts from the Heart Quilts from the Heart 5,000
RCF Family Life Center “Portraits of Promise” Family Nights 1,082
Robins Project, The Movies in the Community: Taking the
theater into the Neighborhood of Warren 5,000
Sewing Bank, The Mending The Community 1,166
Southside Community Garden Yr. 5 – Butterfly and Garden
Enhancement 4,991
Southside Fine Arts Academy Groovin’ the City 2,934
St. Patrick’s Church of Youngstown St. Pat’s Community Gardens
& 4-H Oak Hill Clovers 2,036
Stop One Place Help is Available, Inc. Assistance to the less
fortunate of Trumbull County 5,000
T.N.R. of Warren, Inc. Purrfect Solution to Community Cats
Phase 2 5,000
Taft School Area Block Watch Taft Wildflower/Pollinator Garden
554
Upper North Heights Neighborhood Association Crandall Park
Project 3 1,515
Upton Association, The 4th Grade Ohio History Concentration on
Warren 3,810
Warren Interfaith Community Action Committee Interfaith Park
Revitalization Project Phase One 4,989
West Side Community Center Healthy Lifestyle Family Project
2016 4,589
Youngstown Early College Expanding STEM education through
inquiry learning with 3D-printing 2,948
Youngstown Urban Minority Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Outreach
The Raymond John Wean Foundation Awards Nearly $1.5 Million in Grant; Revitalization, Economic and Educational Opportunities are Focus Areas

(Warren, December 3, 2015) – The board of directors of The Raymond John Wean Foundation awarded grants totaling nearly $1.5 million for organizations that are creating economic opportunities for residents, enhancing educational resources and revitalizing the Mahoning Valley.

The awards include $20,000 to the Youngstown Business Incubator (YBI) for the development of its Women in Entrepreneurship program designed to support the unique issues women entrepreneurs throughout the Mahoning Valley face in starting and growing a business. According to the Small Business Administration, Ohio’s percentage of women-owned businesses is at 27.7 percent and minority owned businesses is at 9.2 percent.

“Building on YBI’s tradition of promoting and cultivating entrepreneurship in the Valley, we believe that this program will bolster women’s potential to achieve their business goals by providing them with personal and professional networking
opportunities and accessible, affordable knowledge and skills,” said Jennifer Roller, president of The Raymond John Wean Foundation. “We look forward to hearing about women-owned breakout success stories.”

The Wean directors also awarded $150,000 to Policy Matters Ohio, an organization striving to create a fair economy, sustainable communities and pathways out of poverty.

Policy Matters’ two-year program in the Mahoning Valley, “Pathways Out of Poverty,” seeks greater access to childcare assistance; advocates for stronger state and federal earned income tax credits and financial aid and college access for low-income students; and continues its longtime work around such issues as predatory lending, including payday loans.

“At Policy Matters, we’ve been fighting for a decade and a half for good jobs and good wages and a strong public sector that can meet the needs of everyone in Ohio,” states Amy Hanauer, executive director of Policy Matters Ohio. She went on to express enthusiasm in deepening her organization’s partnership with The Raymond John Wean Foundation and the Mahoning Valley.

Representing the Foundation’s ongoing commitment to its “Strategic Partners” is the 2016 funding of nearly $1.1 million collectively to Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation, Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership and Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative. The partnership seeks to collectively build capacity to provide voice to residents and leaders throughout the Valley.

Matt Martin, executive director of Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, said the Wean Foundation deserves credit for developing the strategy that created the three organizations dedicated to improving life in the Mahoning Valley. “They conceived the strategy almost a decade ago and they’re sticking to it,” Martin said. “That’s commendable.”
Martin said Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, which turned 5 years old earlier this week, has an active slate of programs that involve everything from affordable home ownership opportunities to public art projects to sentencing alternatives and the tearing down of vacant homes and community volunteerism. “We are bringing back Warren and its neighborhoods. We could do one of these things but not all of them. We can do all of them courtesy of The Raymond John Wean Foundation.”

Other Grant Recipients:

YWCA of Warren was awarded $195,000 for a project that will enable Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio’s Trumbull County Health Center to relocate to the YWCA facility in Warren. Considering the high rate of poverty among female-headed households, lack of health insurance among residents and minimal public transportation, having local access to women’s health care can make a difference to those who need it most.

YWCA of Youngstown was awarded a grant of $32,000 to lead a three-year project to provide supportive services for Mahoning Valley early childhood professionals. YWCA will provide resources, networking and advocacy opportunities.

December 2015 Grant Awards:

Policy Matters Ohio
Pathways Out of Poverty for Mahoning Valley Residents $150,000 over 2 years

Strategic Partnership
Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative up to $350,000
Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation $400,000
Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership $300,000

Youngstown Business Incubator
Women in Entrepreneurship Program $20,000
Three Civic, Education Leaders Name to Panel to Improve Youngstown City Schools

(Nov. 13, 2015 COLUMBUS, Ohio) – Ohio’s superintendent of public instruction today named three dedicated community leaders to serve on the new academic distress commission that will work with the community to improve student learning in the Youngstown City School District.

Named to the commission by State Superintendent Dr. Richard A. Ross were:
• Dr. Laura Meeks, former president of Eastern Gateway Community College;
• Jennifer Roller, president of The Raymond John Wean Foundation; and
• Brian Benyo, president of the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition and member of Gov. John R. Kasich’s Executive Workforce Board.

“Academic distress commissions were created to help chronically struggling schools improve and help ensure all of
Ohio’s boys and girls – regardless of where they live – can receive the education they need to reach their full potential,” said Richard A. Ross, superintendent of public instruction. “We are grateful to these longtime community members who bring their expertise, commitment and passion to serving the students and families of the Youngstown City School District.”

On Oct. 15, 2015, a new state law took effect that strengthens the academic distress commission and required the following appointments to be made within 30 days, including:

- Three members appointed by the state superintendent of public instruction, one of whom is a resident in the county in which the majority of the district’s territory is located;
- One member, who is a teacher employed by the district, appointed by the president of the district board of education; and
- One member appointed by the mayor of the municipality, or if no municipality exists, by the mayor of a municipality selected by the state superintendent

Once academic distress commission members are selected, the superintendent of public instruction appoints a chair. Once the chair is appointed, the commission has 60 days to hire a CEO to begin developing a plan to turnaround the school district.

HB70, the new model for how Ohio helps struggling schools in academic distress, provides better support sooner. The previous academic distress system provided districts with no assistance until they had received three “F” grades in a row. By that time, however, a culture of failure was pervasive and harder to correct. New intensive supports will begin after a district receives its first “F” and will include the appointment of an improvement coordinator to spearhead academic and turnaround efforts.
A school district can transition out of academic distress if it receives an overall grade of “C” or higher and maintains a grade higher than “F” for two additional years. If, however, the district has an academic distress commission for five years, the local school board will transition from an elected board to a board appointed by the mayor. The mayor will appoint board members from a pool of candidates selected by a community group representing parents, teachers, principals, the business community, higher education and the academic distress commission. Once the district improves, the community can choose to return to an elected board or continue with a board appointed by the mayor.

Bios of the academic distress commission members appointed by Dr. Ross:

Dr. Laura Meeks, a Mahoning County resident, served nine years as a teacher, eight years as an administrator and 25 years as a community college president, where she proved herself as a leader who makes things happen. Laura expanded Jefferson Community College, which served one county, into Eastern Gateway Community College, which now serves four counties — giving more students access to a high-quality, affordable education. Eastern Gateway now offers all students who graduate from high school with a GPA greater than 2.5 the opportunity to attend college with no direct tuition costs thanks to grants and scholarships. Laura is proud to help bring an affordable education to more students with Eastern Gateway enrollment having increased 50 percent in the last decade.

Jennifer Roller has been with The Raymond John Wean Foundation since 2007. As president, she works closely with partners to ensure alignment of the Foundation’s vision and strategic priorities. She developed and supervised the Foundation’s resident-driven Neighborhood SUCCESS and Leadership Program. Roller has represented the Foundation’s interests as a
committed civic leader. Before coming to the Foundation, she was the director of Upward Bound and SCOPE at Youngstown State University, programs that seek to increase the enrollment and persistence of first generation students in postsecondary education. Roller earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Youngstown State University and completed a one-year fellowship with the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE), an independent membership organization that promotes effective and responsive philanthropy in black communities.

Brian Benyo is a founding member of the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition, an alliance formed to convene, educate, charge and mobilize the region’s key stakeholders to initiate actions that will stabilize the economy and provide opportunities for individuals and families. Benyo serves as president of Brilex Industries — a worldwide source for fabricating, machining, complete machine assembly and design upgrades. He has a bachelor’s degree in business administration with a focus on production and operations management from The Ohio State University. He serves as a school board member of the Western Reserve Local School District.

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Do You Have an Idea to Make
Your Community Better? Attend Neighborhood SUCCESS and Leadership 1.0: Engaging Residents Upcoming Orientations

(Warren, October 6, 2015) – Grassroots groups from Warren or Youngstown with ideas for making their communities better are invited to attend an upcoming orientation on 2016 funding opportunities through Neighborhood SUCCESS and Leadership 1.0: Engaging Residents, a program of The Raymond John Wean Foundation.

Grants, between $500 and $5,000, are awarded to develop and implement resident-driven projects that align with the Foundation’s strategic priorities: community revitalization, economic opportunity, educational opportunity, including early childhood (0-5) and public service leadership.

Groups in Warren and Youngstown with an intentional focus on encouraging, cultivating and supporting resident engagement and leadership development are encouraged to apply. A Resident Council, broadly representing the diversity of these cities, guides the program and makes the final funding decisions.

Attendance at one of the seven orientation sessions planned throughout October and November is mandatory for grant consideration. A maximum of 30 projects will be funded each year.

For orientation details and to register, visit the Foundation’s website at www.rjweanfdn.org.
Neighborhood SUCCESS and Leadership Program seeks to transform the Valley’s current leadership to include meaningful and informed resident participation in the decision making processes affecting their neighborhoods and communities.

More than 200 ‘Inspire, Connect and Experience’ at Summit ‘15

(Warren, September 25, 2015) — Maia Beatty, a transformational leadership coach, Thursday told more than 200 volunteers, nonprofit leaders, educators and others that networking is the key to challenges facing their organizations — and their personal lives.


During a luncheon workshop, Beatty encouraged everyone to get up and introduce themselves to each other and to ask a simple question, “What should I know about you?”

For Beatty, networking is connecting with other people. Her logic is that everyone needs others to be successful at life and work.

Jennifer Roller, president of The Raymond John Wean Foundation, opened the day introducing YSU President Jim Tressel and telling how he had inspired her years earlier when she heard him speak.
Roller said Tressel talked about his daughter and how she encouraged him to be a leader by “doing the right thing.”

Roller said, “I have remembered that and tried to live it every day at home and at work.”

Speaking during the morning welcome, Tressel said that after 15 months as president of YSU, his understanding of the leadership the university needs to offer has expanded.

“What I believe is the most important thing we can do is to be a major contributor to creating a culture of community in this region, in this state and in this country,” Tressel said. “It’s so important for us to continue to grow to understand that we are insignificant without the other.”

Lori Wiebe, administrative and special projects officer of The Raymond John Wean Foundation, shared an overview of the day as it related to the event’s concepts of connect, inspire and experience.

The conference included eight “Spark Talk” interactive sessions where facilitators worked with participants on topics ranging from telling your story and engaging funders to operating efficiently to maximize resources.

“You told us that you wanted hands-on learning so we’ve approached every component of the event with that in mind,” Wiebe said, explaining that the day also included a Whole Life Wellness Fair, featuring health and wellness tools for “reclaiming the balance” in attendee’s lives.

Kirk Noden, director of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, and an expert in community organizing, discussed strategies for how to run strong and engaged meetings.

Using his experience in community organizing, Noden said, “You can’t move communities to actions unless you are clear about the difference between problems and issues,” he said.
He said the best meetings occur when meeting organizers identify issues to discuss at meetings that are directed at addressing problems.

Janus Small, president of Janus Small Associates LLC, facilitated a panel discussion and workshop about how to select and develop board members.

Architect Paul Hagman, who serves on The Raymond John Wean Foundation board of directors and those of several other organizations, was a panelist in Small’s session.

Hagman explained, “Boards should be working all year to identify candidates who would be strong and share the goals of the organization and who have skills, networks and outlooks that would be useful to that board.”

Deryck Toles, founder and director of Inspiring Minds, also served as a session panelist and added, “Running a non-profit is running a business. The decisions are serious and long-term.”

Barbara Hills, assistant treasurer of Just Because Fun Day, said she was thrilled she attended Summit ‘15 because she identified ideas for helping to keep the 27 members of her organization engaged in the initiative. Just Because Fun Day creates a yearly event for children between the ages of 5 and 16 in Youngstown.

“The Summit serves as a demonstration of the Foundation’s ongoing and deep commitment to capacity building in the Valley,” stated Jennifer Roller, President.