



Amira Jensen

Mike Weir has served as president of the board for Chisholm Trail Communities Foundation the past two years. More than \$500,000 was distributed to nonprofits through the foundation last year.

## Blazing a trail for nonprofits

By AMIRA JENSEN

The Chisholm Trail Communities Foundation has been bridging the gap between nonprofit organizations and the Williamson County community since 1998. This past year, the foundation launched seven new funds and distributed more than \$500,000 to nonprofits despite the challenged economy.

The foundation began when a group of parents banded together to focus mainly on improving education. Interests expanded over the years and in 2008, the Chisholm Trail Communities Foundation became part of the U.S. Community Foundations network. The foundation is now one of 39 community foundations in Texas and 700 throughout the country. The foundation now serves a broad spectrum of causes, from education to food and shelter to the arts.

"The idea is if you live in a community, you'll have a better idea of what the needs are," Project Manager Julie Johnson said. "We help build synergy and connect needs to people in the community with philanthropic interests."

To do that, the foundation offers a variety of services to both local nonprofit organizations as well as donors. Organizations under the foundation's umbrella obtain a 501(c)3

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**Julie Johnson**  
Project Manager

status, and the foundation tracks all of the funds going in and out of the organizations. President Mike Weir said a number of small organizations, such as the Georgetown Fire Department's Pipes and Drums, are able to operate more easily through their fund with the foundation.

"When they need new drums, we pay for it," Mr. Weir said. "So they can be busy playing drums and fighting fires and not have to worry about the financial aspect of it."

Seven new funds were started through Chisholm Trail Communities Foundation in 2011, including a charitable fund started by Mr. Weir and his wife. The Aging Initiative, a survey aimed to address local elderly needs,

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## CHISHOLM

### Foundation handled \$500K in 2011

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began through the foundation. The Georgetown Symphony Society decided last year to have the foundation handle its accounting. Other funds include GISD Performing Arts, Wells Fargo Changemakers, the Jonah Community Fund and The Institute for Excellence in Nonprofits.

"Not having to worry about filing a 501(c)3, not having to worry about all of those things that go along with managing the money has certainly allowed us to just focus on getting these services organized and starting to provide them," said Vic Figurelli, founder of The Institute for Excellence in Nonprofits, or The Institute for short.

The Institute consists of a group of volunteers from the business world that host seminars and act as pro bono consultants for other nonprofit organizations. The organization formed in June 2010 and began a fund through the foundation to not have to "worry about the nuts and bolts of running the organization" during its formation period, Mr. Figurelli said.

While some organizations continue working under the foundation's umbrella, such as the Backpack Buddy Program and the Georgetown Community Resource Center, others like The Caring Place outgrew the foundation and established its own accounting department.

"And we say, go with our blessing," Ms. Johnson said.

Chisholm Trail Communities Foundation also serves to benefit its donors of various types. Some donors designate their contribution specifically to a particular fund, while others donate to support a general area, such as animal welfare, arts and culture or women's issues. Others make general donations to The Chisholm Trail Fund, which is then distributed annually as determined by the board of directors. In 2011, more than \$500,000 exchanged hands between donors and organizations through the foundation.

"That's half a million spent on nonprofits on personnel, supplies, units," Mr. Weir said. "It doesn't just die, it multiplies through the community and has a substantial

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**Paul Jordan**  
Board member

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impact on the community"

By holding nonprofit organizations fiscally accountable, Mr. Weir said the hope is to assure donors that their contributions are going toward what they intend them to. Last year, assets under the foundation's management grew to \$1.2 million.

"The funds have grown greater than anything in the economy, other than the number of foreclosures," Mr. Weir joked.

Mr. Weir, a Georgetown native, has been a member of the board for four years and president for the past two years. As the new year begins, the retired pediatric hospitalist passes the baton to board member Paul Jordan, a business attorney at Sneed, Vine and Perry law firm in Georgetown. Mr. Jordan joined the board two years ago when he learned about the work that the foundation did.

"It seemed to fill a little niche where the focus was truly to build an endowment and to have a lasting impact," Mr. Jordan said.

Mr. Jordan is a board member of several other nonprofit organizations, such as Partners in Education and The Georgetown Project. When the foundation's board meets this month, he plans to ask where the board would like to see the foundation in five years and then make a plan for 2012. Mr. Jordan's goal as president is to bring the same amount of integrity to the foundation as Mr. Weir did, he said.

"If I can continue that, I think I'd be doing a pretty good job," Mr. Jordan said.

As the needs of the community rise, the goal of the Chisholm Trail Communities Foundation is to match the needs with those who want to give. More so, its goal is to keep information flowing between the two to have those needs met faster.

"It has done a fairly remarkable job during some pretty difficult economic times," Mr. Jordan said. "It's held its own."

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