RUTH M. TIECHE FRIEND OF PHILANTHROPY AWARD

John and Judy Kropf

For more than five decades, John and Judy Kropf of Orrville, Ohio, have quietly shaped the lives of countless individuals across Wayne County through a philosophy of service rooted in compassion, faith, and community responsibility. While many philanthropists are known primarily for financial contributions, the Kropfs have built a legacy defined equally by personal involvement, advocacy, and hands-on support for those facing hardship. Their lives demonstrate that philanthropy is not simply about giving money, but about investing time, energy, leadership, and love into the well-being of others.

John and Judy Kropf have long been recognized as pillars of the Orrville and Wayne County communities. Married since 1970, they have dedicated themselves to helping individuals who are often overlooked or underserved, including survivors of domestic violence, struggling families, individuals battling addiction, at-risk youth, and LGBTQ+ students seeking educational opportunities. Friends and colleagues frequently describe the couple as people who work quietly behind the scenes, rarely seeking public recognition for their efforts.

The couple's commitment to education is reflected in their longstanding support of learning opportunities throughout Wayne County and beyond. John played an instrumental role in the establishment of The University of Akron-Wayne College in Orrville, helping expand access to higher education for students across the region. Among their most meaningful contributions was the creation of the Scholarship for Inclusion and Diversity at Wayne College, which supports LGBTQ+ students pursuing higher education. The scholarship reflects the Kropfs' belief that every student deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed, regardless of personal identity or circumstance.

John has also demonstrated a lifelong commitment to higher education through his service as a trustee of Baldwin Wallace University since 1981, including six years as president of the Board of Trustees. During his tenure, the university completed its most ambitious fundraising campaign to date, raising approximately $94 million to enhance educational opportunities and support future generations of students.

The Kropfs' philanthropy has also deeply influenced social service organizations throughout Wayne County. Both John and Judy have served in leadership positions with OneEighty, (formerly Every Woman's House and STEPS), an organization that provide services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and substance abuse. John served on the Every Woman's House Board of Trustees and helped lead a successful $4.2 million capital campaign that funded a new shelter and renovated facilities for survivors and their children. Judy served eight years on the STEPS Board of Trustees, including two years as president, and continues to support the organization through committee service and advocacy.

In addition, the couple has dedicated years of volunteer leadership to The Village Network, an organization serving vulnerable and at-risk youth. Both John and Judy have been honored through induction into The Village Network Hall of Fame in recognition of their extraordinary commitment and service. Judy also served on the Orrville City Schools Board of Education and has been a staunch advocate for the Orrville Public Library, demonstrating her belief that strong communities are built through educational and civic engagement.

RUTH M. TIECHE

The Friend of Philanthropy Award is named in honor of Ruth M. Tieche. Ruth worked at Freedlander's Department Store for nearly 60 years, retiring in 1975 as the personnel director. She passed away in March 1989, at the age of 90, leaving no survivors. Through a bequest, Ruth left $384,000 to the Foundation as an unrestricted gift.

Ruth's generosity brought the total assets under the care of the Foundation to more than $1 million – a major milestone for the young organization. With careful stewardship, her initial gift has continued to grow while also awarding funds back into the community through the Foundation's competitive grant cycle. Unrestricted gifts, like the one provided by Ruth, allow the Foundation to meet the ever-changing needs of our community for years to come.

Faith is central to the Kropfs' approach to philanthropy. As active members of the United Church of Christ in Orrville, they have consistently put their faith into action through practical acts of service. John is affectionately known within the congregation as the "Jolly Rancher Guy" for the candy he shares with children each Sunday. For decades, he has also operated the church "wood lot," chopping and delivering firewood to support youth mission trips and charitable outreach.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of John and Judy Kropf's philanthropy is the deeply personal nature of their giving. Beyond boardrooms and fundraising campaigns, they have helped individuals secure transportation, navigate legal systems, recover from addiction, escape abusive situations, and pursue education and employment opportunities. Their generosity is not limited to organizations; it extends directly into the lives of people who need encouragement, dignity, and hope.

Through quiet leadership, unwavering compassion, and a lifelong dedication to serving others, John and Judy Kropf embody the true spirit of philanthropy. Their legacy is evident not only in scholarships, buildings, and nonprofit organizations, but in the countless lives they have strengthened through kindness, advocacy, and faith-driven service.

Previous Award Recipients

Stanley C. & Flo K. Gault, 2013
The J.M. Smucker Family, 2014
The Donald & Alice Noble Family, 2015
Greg & Kathy Long, 2016
Barry Romich, 2017
Stephen & Cheryl Shapiro, 2018
Michael & Stephanie Reardon, 2019
Richard & Judy Seaman, 2022
John C. Johnston III, 2023
Ron & Prue Holtman, 2024
Mary Alice Streeter, 2025

**No recipients in 2020 or 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic*

The Friend of Philanthropy Award was created to honor those who make a difference in our communities with their philanthropic activities – the giving of treasure, time, and talent – for the betterment of the Wayne County area. It is presented at Wayne County Community Foundation's Annual Dinner. For more details on the award and nomination process, please visit us online at **www.wccfoh.org** or call **330.262.3877**.