

## FRIEND OF PHILANTHROPY

### Barry Romich



His father was a farmer, a village councilman, and a volunteer fireman. His mother, an elementary school teacher with a passion for music. They both served their church and volunteered throughout their local community.

Through it all, their young son Barry watched. And he learned. The lesson? It is important to give back. Generosity is a virtue. Take care of those in need.

And so, as Barry Romich built a successful career, he kept that lesson in mind. Because of his success as a business owner, Romich was able to start the Romich Foundation and establish the Romich Family Fund at Wayne County Community Foundation.

A native of Creston, Ohio, Romich studied engineering at Case Western Reserve University. As a student working part-time in a research lab, he met Ed Prentke, an engineer at Highland View Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio. The two men, very different in age, background, and personality, soon found they had a mission in common: to help individuals with disabilities. Prentke and Romich decided to form a

partnership and, in 1966, the Prentke Romich Company (PRC) was born. Over the years, the company has grown and today employs over 200 people through several international subsidiaries. In 2003, the company began to transition to an employee stock ownership plan. After stepping down as president of PRC, Barry turned his focus towards projects closer to home, lending his expertise unselfishly.

**Through the Romich Foundation and his fund at WCCF, Barry supports schools and nonprofit organizations** that promote STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in Wayne County, Ohio. Several years ago, Romich had the opportunity to attend a few state and national competitions for students interested in robotics, technology, and engineering. This experience prompted him to wonder, "Why isn't this happening in Wayne County?" So, he made it happen! Working with area school districts, Romich was instrumental in furthering STEM education and bringing robotics clubs to students across the county. Northwestern Local Schools now has programs for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

## “It is important to give back. Generosity is a virtue. Take care of those in need.”

Dalton Intermediate School's STEM program partners with local businesses to focus on projects to create sustainable living. “The Nerd Herd”, a robotics club at Chippewa Middle School, has also benefited from Romich's generosity. And Romich's home school district, Norwayne Local Schools, now has a number of STEM and maker initiatives. In addition, University of Akron – Wayne College has been able to expand their 3D printing initiative, including CAD design and developing a maker space.

**Another particular interest of Romich's is to serve the needs of disadvantaged individuals.** Thanks to his generosity, the Wayne County Park District was able to construct an ADA-accessible pavilion at the Barnes Preserve in Wooster. In addition, the Cornerstone PlayLab received support to create an ADA compliant, safe play space for all youth, including those with disabilities.

Romich is also a proponent of sustainable energy. One of the first projects he supported through his foundation, in conjunction with the Wayne County Sustainable Energy Network (where Romich is a board member), was the creation of a solar power station for Habitat for Humanity. The towable trailer allows Habitat to use renewable energy to power a variety of tools at construction sites. Romich was also instrumental in bringing sustainable energy to Norwayne Elementary, utilizing solar panels on a pavilion in the outdoor classroom space. Solar panels have also been installed on the concession stand at Norwayne High School athletic fields.

When asked if there were anything he'd do differently, Romich responded that he would have liked to have started being more “intentional” with his giving from the very beginning. “Earlier in my career, it was never my plan for Romich Foundation to exist,” states Romich. “The modest wealth that was achieved was sort of an accident, a natural by-product of a successful business.” Through Romich Foundation and WCCF, Romich and his wife,

Robin Wisner, have discovered the joy of philanthropy and it is now part of their daily lives.

In establishing the Friend of Philanthropy Award, the Foundation wanted to recognize the difference that individuals can make through personal commitment and leadership, taking into account the impact such individuals have on our community, and the role that their creativity and advocacy can play in a project's success. Barry Romich embodies the very best of all these qualities, and has generously shared them with the members of this community. Romich truly appreciates the Wayne County community, stating “What we have is excellent. It doesn't stay that way without involvement from the community. We all have an obligation to give back what we can.”

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### 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

The Friend of Philanthropy Award was created to honor those who make a difference in our communities with their philanthropic activities – the giving of time, talent or treasure – for the betterment of the Wayne County area. It will be presented each year at Wayne County Community Foundation's Annual Dinner. For more details on the award and nomination process, please visit us online at [WayneCountyCommunityFoundation.org](http://WayneCountyCommunityFoundation.org) or call 330.262.3877.

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