

Stepping up to help our neighbors  
by the Southwester staff

Although there's no denying that it's been a tough year for Southwest residents, we can be grateful for the many local organizations working to bring assistance and comfort to the neighborhood. The Friends of Southwest DC annual report, just released, highlights its support to community organizations that have worked through the pandemic to bring vital programs and opportunities to Southwesters.

As the pandemic exposed new needs among Southwest residents and curtailed much traditional programming by civic groups, Friends of Southwest DC reached out to new partners and adapted its grant-giving to the new circumstances. Two grants in 2020 supported the food pantry now operating at Christ United Methodist Church, while another supported the Bread for Life hot breakfast program at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church. Together, these programs brought thousands of meals to Southwest families. This was the first time Friends of Southwest and local churches partnered to help the community.

Other grants supported a Thanksgiving Food Drive for Southwest neighbors organized by the Dent House Community Center in Buzzard Point and a Christmas Toys for Tots collection by the Southwest Comm-Unity Forum that took place at Westminster Presbyterian Church. A grant to the Living Classrooms Foundation at Dent House helped launch a jobs reentry program for Southwest residents who lost jobs in the pandemic.

"If you see a small community organization at work in Southwest, there's a good chance it's benefited from a grant from Friends of Southwest DC," said Peter Eicher, the group's president. "Over the past two decades, we've made grants to more than 40 different local groups. We couldn't be prouder of the work they're doing to make Southwest a better place. And, of course, we're deeply grateful to our donors, who have made all this possible."

In addition to its new focus on charitable programs, Friends of Southwest DC made grants in 2020 for scholarships for Southwest youth to attend Camp Arena Stage, which was conducted virtually. A grant to DC STORM enabled a group of Southwest youth to take an educational/cultural field trip to Hampton, Virginia, while carefully adhering to health guidelines. A grant to Southwest Community Gardens was used to purchase gardening tools, seeds, soil, and supplies. Several other groups also received grants.

Friends of Southwest DC also has been one of the largest funders of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly. SWNA president Donna Purchase commented: "Over the years, Friends of Southwest has been a mighty source of support to SWNA, including generous grants to our task forces." In 2020 Friends of Southwest funded five SWNA college scholarships, a program it has supported since 1999. A separate 2020 grant went to the creation of a new SWNA website, enabling it to better serve the community.

"The past year has been a tough one for fundraising, since we rely almost entirely on individual donations from neighbors" remarked Eicher, the Friends of Southwest DC president. "Still, we're pressing ahead." In fact, already in 2021 Friends of Southwest DC

has awarded grants for a food program for the new Southwest transitional housing at the Aya, a program for Southwest youth to appear on talk radio, a clothing drive for Southwest children, and Arena Stage youth programs. It has also made funds available for a subsidized membership program for the Waterfront Village for seniors, and for school supply distribution once schools reopen. "We hope our neighbors will recognize the value of what we do and continue to donate," said Eicher, "there's so much to be done and we can't do it without their support."

Friends of Southwest is always open for grant applications from local organizations. To apply or to make a donation, please visit the Friends of Southwest DC website at [FriendsofSWDC.org](http://FriendsofSWDC.org), or mail a check to Friends of Southwest DC at P.O. Box 44434, Washington, DC 20026.