**HERE’S TO THE NEXT 100 YEARS:**

**SHARED KNOWLEDGE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS**

Thank you so much for coming together tonight to mark another successful year for the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, and for including me in this celebration. It’s good to be home – and good to be at our community foundation.

In the world of philanthropy community foundations play a special role. They are fundraisers and grant makers, resource aggregators and trusted stewards, conveners and bridge builders, leaders and responders, learners and educators. Today more than 1,750 community foundations are at work around the world. Their communities range from Silicon Valley to Brazil, from South Africa to Russia, from India to Australia, and from Hawaii to…well, Ithaca.

I am sure that even Frederick Goff, founder of the very first community foundation in Cleveland, Ohio, would be amazed at the way his “baby” has grown. 100 years ago he was a man with a vision…

So let’s take a walk back to 1914. It was the year that saw the beginning of regularly-scheduled commercial airline passenger service, with flights between St. Petersburg and Tampa, and the year that the first steamboat passed through the Panama Canal. It was the year that President Woodrow Wilson signed the first Mother’s Day proclamation, and the year that saw the debut of “The Perils of Pauline.” Merrill Lynch was founded in 1914, and the Federal Reserve Bank officially opened for business. Henry Ford introduced the assembly line for his Model T, and in Ludlow, Colorado the state’s National Guard attacked a colony of over a thousand striking coal miners, killing 24 of them. In Boston, Joseph Patrick Kennedy married Rose Fitzgerald, and Babe Ruth made his major league debut as a pitcher for the Red Sox. For any Cubbies fans here tonight, 1914 saw the opening of what came to be Wrigley Field. World War I began…it would take nearly 20,000,000 lives.

And at the very beginning of that tumultuous, horrible, and very good year - on January 2 - the Cleveland Foundation was formed.

We might wonder “What was Frederick Goff thinking?” He was certainly very familiar with those giants of industry and philanthropy whose private foundations were emerging, and as a lawyer and banker, had several direct connections with Rockefeller business and family interests. His years heading the Cleveland Trust Company also made him quite aware of what he called the “dead hand of the past,” and of charitable endowments which literally outlived their stated, irrevocable purposes – an endowment to provide watering troughs for horses, for example.

Goff imagined something different, something less elitist than the private foundations and more organic than the outdated trusts – something he initially called a “community chest” – an institution that could pool the resources of Cleveland’s philanthropists, large and small, living and dead, to provide one permanent fund for the betterment of the city. As he later said, “How fine it would be if a man about to make a will could go to a permanently enduring institution…and say, ‘Here is a large sum of money. I want to leave it to be used for the good of the community, but I have no way of knowing what will be the greatest need of the community 50 years from now, or even 10 years from now. Therefore, I place it in your hands, because you will be here, you and your successors, through the years, to determine what should be done with this sum to make it most useful for people of each succeeding generation.” Goff also wanted the insure that this “permanently enduring institution” could accommodate the future through the ability to modify funds as conditions changed and new needs emerged in Cleveland. To drive home the message that this entity belonged to no one donor but rather to the community, Goff called for a board of civically-engaged local citizens who would serve without compensation for limited terms, and whose operations would be visible in, and accountable to, the community they represented.

The place-based community foundation which has emerged from Goff’s vision is both simple and powerful. Its bottom-line mission is to generate local resources for local needs. But it accomplishes that mission not simply by raising money, but also by educating community members - its neighbors – to see and to care, thus empowering them to support causes close to home and close to the heart.

Grant making may be the community foundation function that reaps the greatest attention, but at the core, a community foundation is a place of and for learning and civic engagement. At a recent 100th anniversary celebration in Washington, current Cleveland Foundation president Ron Richard noted, “Education is the base for everything else we do,” and warned that we may find ourselves challenged by a wealth of information but perhaps less knowledge and wisdom than we need. From the very beginning, the Cleveland Foundation engaged in research, evaluation, the dissemination of knowledge, and advocacy – a combination of strategies even more necessary 100 years later.

In Tompkins County, where education is our major industry and lifetime learning is so highly valued and pursued, our community foundation understands that giving and learning are inextricably connected. This, above all else, gives a community foundation its enduring appeal as an agent of change and defines what makes a community foundation “great.”

A great community foundation must know its community’s strengths and its challenges in order to learn how to harness available assets to make a difference. We learn through patient and strategic listening – to grant applicants, donors, other community members, other grant makers. We learn through surveys, academic research, and the analysis of data. We learn when we encourage honesty, innovation and risk-taking. We learn when we broaden our reach to include the underserved and under-heard. We learn every time we convene, collaborate, evaluate, participate.

A great community foundation must also communicate its knowledge in order to educate, engender trust, and build a constantly growing circle of knowledge among donors, nonprofit and funding partners, community members, policymakers, staff and board. We are honest and encouraging in discussing impact. We spread ideas that work, and make clear the difference between symptoms and root causes. We use technology to reach larger audiences. We focus on community, rather than organizations, as we recognize the interconnectedness of challenges and solutions.

And a great community foundation must sometimes lead and advocate. We accept that there are times that push us beyond reaction and response to community needs – times that require instead that we step out in front and call attention to those issues which are hidden, unnamed, or unrecognized. We are willing to catalyze even the most difficult conversations, and we create safe spaces to bring diverse perspectives to the table. And we understand that public policy cannot and should not be ignored. The recently released tax reform draft bill includes a provision regarding donor advised funds that would be very damaging to those funds, to their donor advisers, and to their sponsoring organizations – including the 700 or so U.S. community foundations that hold those funds. Community foundations must speak out about that provision, but more important, about what they do, and most important, why they do it. We may not be able to conjure up the ghost of Frederick Goff to send into the halls of Congress, but I would be happy to have George Ferrari in Washington any time!

Last Friday, I traveled to New Jersey to celebrate another 100 years – my one remaining aunt’s 100th birthday. She is still quite formidable at 100, and the “cousins” pondered how – and frankly whether – we would be celebrating any of our own centennials. Whatever I think of my own mortality, or that of my wild and crazy cousins, I have no doubt that there is a bright and long future ahead for the Community Foundation of Tompkins County and its community foundation colleagues around the world. Congratulations to the Cleveland Foundation, to the board, staff, supporters, and nonprofit partners of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, and to all those who are here tonight to celebrate.

Here’s to the next 100 years of a great idea!