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Community Foundation leader to retire
Holly C. Sampson has led nonprofit through 30 years of growth, impact

DULUTH—Holly C. Sampson, president and CEO of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation since 1990, announced today that she will retire effective June 30.

“It has been an honor and a privilege to lead this organization and work with so many people dedicated to the quality of life of our region,” Sampson said. “We have touched and improved lives in the Northland. Every day has been exciting, inspiring and rewarding for me.”

She added: “This is the right time to move to the next chapter, for the Community Foundation and for me. I will work with the Board of Trustees on a transition plan that ensures the strength and health of this organization so it can continue to support the strength and health of this special place we call home.”

The Community Foundation is one of the Northland’s farthest-reaching and most important foundations. Its mission is to encourage private giving for the public good through a community endowment built by gifts from thousands of individuals and organizations.

Guided by a volunteer Board of Trustees, the Community Foundation makes grants to nonprofits for projects and to individuals for scholarships while providing leadership on important community initiatives in seven counties of northeast Minnesota and three counties of northwest Wisconsin. Its coverage area extends from International Falls on the north to Carlton on the south and from Aitkin on the west to Ashland on the east.

Since its start in 1983, it has distributed more than $59 million in grants and scholarships and has established more than 430 funds. Sampson has overseen significant growth, from $6 million to more than $79 million under management, and with $2 million distributed in the last year alone.

Sampson, 65, has led the Community Foundation since 1990. She came to the organization after a career as a planner, social worker and consultant. The Minneapolis native fell in love with the Lake Superior region. She has dedicated her career to growing and supporting the place and its people.
Some of the Community Foundation’s key work during Sampson’s tenure has included:

- **Creation of Speak Your Peace: The Civility Project**, which encourages civic engagement by building and sustaining civil discourse. The program has become synonymous with the Twin Ports, helping the region address challenges and opportunities since its inception in 2003, and spreading nationwide and worldwide since.

- **Development of Opportunity Rising**, an initiative to narrow the opportunity gap between rich and poor children in Duluth and Superior. The program, which began in 2015, has distributed nearly $2 million to help families with children achieve full human potential in a region where poverty exceeds state and national averages. Sampson now serves on the Strategic Advisory Council, providing leadership for 55 U.S. community foundations that have made commitments to narrowing the opportunity gap.

- **Attracting and retaining young adults in the Northland** to improve lives and address workforce needs. This effort included creation of TwinPortsConnex, an initiative that helped young adults, and especially students at the region’s colleges and universities, connect with employers so they could stay here. In 2014, the program merged with NORTHFORCE, another nonprofit focused on similar goals.

- **Encouraging and developing programs** that tap philanthropic involvement to support disaster preparation and recovery, now a collaboration called Ready North. This initiative began in 2012 after a devastating flash flood did more than $200 million in damage to the region. Sampson coordinated philanthropic recovery efforts, including raising more than $2 million in collaboration with the United Way and the Northland Foundation. Sampson now serves on the Advisory Council for the international Center for Disaster Philanthropy.

“All of this work could not have happened without the support of our dedicated and visionary donors, volunteers and community leaders,” Sampson said. “I am grateful to have worked with so many who have focused their talents and resources on so much to strengthen our region.”

Outside of the Community Foundation, Sampson has served as president of Rotary Club 25 of Duluth and also has collaborated with many other organizations, linking Northland work to national and global initiatives. Her efforts have included: founding the Minnesota Disaster Philanthropy Working Group, chairing the task force that established the Minnesota Principles for Grantmakers, chairing the Minnesota Council on Foundations, serving on the national Council on Foundations leadership team that created U.S. standards for community foundations and building community foundations worldwide through the Transatlantic Community Foundation Fellowship with the Community Foundation in Northern Ireland.

David Kropid, chair of the Community Foundation Board of Trustees, said the board will work with Sampson on a leadership transition and will begin the search for her successor.

“Holly has been the face of the Community Foundation for 30 years, leading bold programs and vital support systems that have changed lives and our region for the better,” he said. “To her, we say thank you on behalf of everyone in the Northland.”

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