



A TASTE OF MISSOULA'S FINEST: A Sold-Out Success!

On September 25, our community came together to celebrate culinary creativity, local talent, and shared generosity at **Taste of Missoula's Finest** — and what a night it was! We were thrilled to welcome a **sold-out crowd of 100 guests** for an evening filled with delicious food, lively conversation, and inspiring community spirit.

The real stars of the evening were our **incredible local chefs**, who wowed guests with their artistry and flavors. A heartfelt thank-you to **Nate Keller, Abe Risho, Dominic Glenna, Bert Gahagan, and Gretchen Taylor**, as well as the **Blackfoot Valley Cattlewomen**, for lending their time, talent, and passion to make this event truly unforgettable.

To complete the experience, **live jazz by musicians Dylan Bautista and Owen Ross** created the perfect ambiance — adding warmth and rhythm to a night of celebration.

Together, we celebrated not only Missoula's vibrant food scene but also the mission behind it all — supporting the programs of our **Honeyberry Culinary Classroom** on the second floor of the G.W. Marks Exploration Center. These programs connect people of all ages with the joy of cooking, nutrition education, and community learning.

Thanks to the **generous support of our attendees, sponsors, and auction donors**, we are proud to share that we **raised \$44,000** to continue growing these opportunities.



Above Top: HAHCF board members Jeff Kicklighter, Hilary Cuddy, Bev Gutman and Kari Brittain helped create our amazing centerpieces, filling baskets with fresh produce, veggies, colorful gourds, sourdough bread, honey and homemade jam — much of which they grew or made themselves. Ten lucky guests got to purchase the edible centerpieces and enjoy the fall bounty long after the event. Board members also made baskets to thank the amazing chefs.

Above Bottom: Board member Charlotte Iverson spent the day before the event making desserts. Each year the Blackfoot Valley Cattlewomen provide homemade desserts for the event.



Go to <https://bit.ly/Culinary-Classroom-Video> or use the QR code to watch a short video to learn more about how the Honeyberry Culinary Classroom programs are making a difference.





**Healthy Acres
Healthy Communities
Foundation**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Melanie Bengtson
Kari Brittain
Shawn Clouse
Hilary Cuddy
Beverly Gutman
Charlotte Iverson
Jeff Kicklighter
Loni Waters
Erin Yost-Miller

MISSOULA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY AND EXTENSION STAFF

Bryce Christiaens,
Department Director

Jean Jenkins,
Foundation Coordinator

WELCOMING INTERNATIONAL GUESTS

In October, we had the pleasure of meeting with Nathan from Vietnam and Faris from Indonesia, two fellows visiting Montana through the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Academic Fellow Program with the Mike and Maureen Mansfield Center at the University of Montana. They toured the G. W. Marks Exploration Center and the Rocky Mountain Gardens. Sarah shared the vision for the gardens, and we discussed composting processes and the challenges of composting in a climate with higher humidity. Both Nathan and Faris do fundraising for their organizations. Jean shared the history of creating the Healthy Acres nonprofit and its role in the capital campaign for the building of the Exploration Center and the Rocky Mountain Gardens. We enjoyed their visit and learned a lot about fundraising challenges in their home countries. Thank you to the Montana Natural History Center for connecting us with these guests.



Pictured left to right: Sarah Holden, MSU Horticulture Agent; Jean Jenkins, HAHCF Foundation Coordinator; Alyssa Correll, MNHC; Mr. Nathan, from Vietnam and Mr. Faris from Indonesia

The Art of Saving Taxes and Feeling Good About It: Tax Benefits of a Charitable Heart

On October 18, **Andrew A. George, J.D., M.B.A.**, whose local law practice focuses on estate planning, probate, and corporate planning, presented "The Art of Saving Taxes and Feeling Good About It." He shared practical ways to make charitable giving both rewarding and tax-smart, including strategies for gifting appreciated assets, creating charitable trusts, and incorporating philanthropy into estate plans.

As the year ends, it's a great time to consider **year-end charitable gifts**. Giving before December 31, can reduce taxable income while supporting causes you care about. For those age **70½ or older**, making a **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)** directly from an IRA can satisfy **Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) without increasing taxable income** — a simple and effective way to give and feel good about it.

WELCOMING NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

We're excited to introduce two new board members of the Healthy Acres Healthy Communities Foundation: **Hilary Cuddy** and **Jeff Kicklighter**! Both bring incredible passion, experience, and heart to our mission of helping Missoula thrive through healthy living and community connection.



Hilary Cuddy

Hilary's background in Exercise Science and community health makes her a natural fit for HAHCF. She's passionate about keeping our community active and healthy — whether that's through nutritious food, outdoor recreation, or simply enjoying time in the garden. A longtime volunteer at the Rocky Mountain Gardens, Hilary loves getting her hands dirty and encourages her daughter to do the same!

For 15 years, Hilary worked with the Missoula Family YMCA, helping lead healthy food and youth programs. She also spent a decade as the Course Director for the annual Riverbank Run, helping keep a cherished Missoula tradition alive and well. Hilary and her husband, John, own Sprinkler Maniac, an underground sprinkler company. Hilary's eager to bring her love of gardening, good nutrition, and youth conservation to our community through her work with HAHCF.



Jeff Kicklighter

Jeff recently completed the MSU County Extension's Master Gardener program and has embraced every opportunity it has opened for him — from volunteering and attending events to connecting with fellow gardeners. He and his wife, Jaime, are currently restoring two acres of their family's land to native plants and trees — a project that reflects Jeff's deep appreciation for nature and community stewardship.

You can often find Jeff volunteering at the Rocky Mountain Gardens, where his enthusiasm and creativity help our programs continue to grow. Outside the garden, Jeff works in the live events and hospitality industries and currently serves as Director of Production at TVG Hospitality. His experience in planning, design, and production adds a fresh perspective to our board.

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

Rocky Mountain Gardens and Exploration Center Membership Info

Are you a Member? Is it time to renew?

Membership supports:

- **Garden maintenance.**
- **Free admission** to the gardens for all visitors.
- **Public programming** addressing sustainable land management, pollinator conservation, gardening, nutrition, and youth development.

Member benefits:

- **Reduced fees** for MCDEE programs and classes.
- **Member-only discounts** at local businesses.

Become a member here by clicking the QR code or go to: healthyacres.org/take-action/become-a-member.html



Healthy Acres
Healthy Communities
Foundation

YOUR IMPACT

Financial support provided during FY 2024 – 25 and FY to date in 2025

Because of your generous support, we were able to make a lasting difference through our youth and community programs.

For FY 2024 – 2025, your contributions supported:

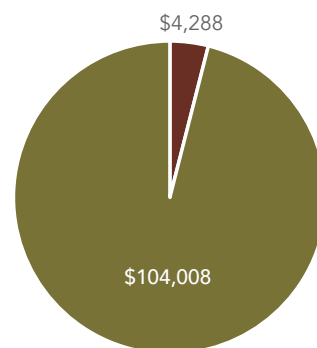
- **Youth Development Programs** — providing transportation for educational field trips that connect students directly with nature. Through our five established youth programs: Nature's Traveler: Seed Dispersal, Purpose of Plants, Nature Walk Week, Leave No Weeds, and Earth Stewardship Week in partnership with the Bitterroot Water Forum, we reached 2,772 students this year. Your gifts funded:
 - o **28 round-trip buses** for Leave No Weeds
 - o **5 schools** participating in Nature Walk Week
 - o **Transportation for 10 additional schools** taking part in Purpose of Plants and Nature's Traveler: Seed Dispersal programsThese experiences included field trips for 838 fifth graders, who explored Mt. Jumbo while learning about plant biodiversity and the threats of invasive species.
- **Rocky Mountain Gardens** — your support also advanced the ongoing installation and maintenance of over 20 distinct growing areas in the gardens by providing essential tools, materials, plants, and equipment rentals that bring this vibrant educational and community space to life.

For FY 2025 Year-to-Date, continued generosity has sustained programs like Leave No Weeds and other environmental education initiatives, ensuring that students and community members alike can experience hands-on learning in Montana's unique landscapes.

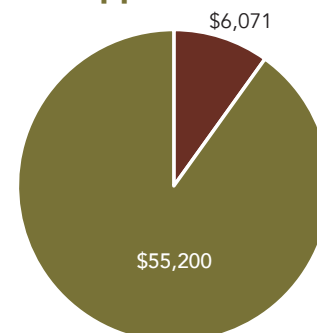


Your membership at work inside the Rocky Mountain Gardens!

Total Support FY 24-25



Total Support FYTD 2025



■ Youth Development ■ Rocky Mountain Gardens

WHO WE ARE

We inspire a lifelong connection with nature through the topics of ecology, habitat, food, and gardening, by promoting curiosity for the world around us.

Our home is the **G.W. Marks Exploration Center and Rocky Mountain Gardens**, an educational center featuring hands-on activities and innovative programs led by the Missoula County Department of Ecology & Extension (MCDEE).

OUR MISSION

To provide philanthropic support for the coordination, education outreach and training using current research-based resources to address the needs of the public in the areas of Land Management, Youth Development and Family and Consumer Sciences through the programs of Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension.



Students attending 2025 field trips with the youth programs of the Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension, supported by the Healthy Acres Healthy Communities Foundation.

