



*The following is an excerpt from a history given to new board members by former board member Rhoel B. Henderson III. Mr. Henderson spent decades dedicating his energies and expertise to the Jamestown community and served on the Gebbie Foundation Board of Directors for 24 years, from 1993-2017. As a board member, he served as President, Treasurer and chair of several committees including the Investment & Finance Committees.*

## Gebbie Foundation Historical Perspective

The Gebbie family and the Foundation, founded by them, have always worked and contributed in the background. Even before the Foundation was formed, the family performed many good works for agencies and individuals, most of which the public was never aware.

Prior to my board service, two major contributions were especially notable: a grant to The Chautauqua Institution and another to The Chautauqua Region Community Foundation (CRCF). The grant agreement to the Institution held stipulations that turned it around from an organization with deep financial problems, to what it is today. CRCF was given \$300,000 in seed money and has now become a \$60,000,000 asset to the community.

I remember working with such notable board members as Bill Parker, Geddie Parker, and Bertram Parker, the family representatives. I also served with non-family members such as Buck Franks, Chuck Hall, Linda Swanson, George Campbell, Becky Robbins, Lillian Ney, Marty Coyle, Paul Sandberg, and John Hamilton. John Hamilton was an original board member, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Foundation with duties that included investment activities.

From my perspective, there are two watershed moments that stand out. One was when the Gebbie Board decided to change the Foundation structure to an Executive Director who would not serve as a board member, and to realign staff positions. We also instituted methods to limit terms of service enabling the board to bring in quality new members. The second was the decision, at a board retreat, to take the path of becoming proactive in grant-making with the idea of pursuing the development of a large economic development project. From these brainstorming sessions, the concept of the Ice Arena being that project emerged. A second and separate goal was to try to improve the self-image of our community. The Arena turned out to be the catalyst for doing both.

The Foundation decided to move away from the reactive form of traditional grant-making to human service and arts organizations, to instead, focus on targeted Economic Development funding. This was a painful transition for the grantees, as well as, the staff and Board. Some grants were stopped immediately while others were decreased over a period of 3 years.

The bottom line was that Gebbie had changed its staffing model, investment method, Board members, and strategic focus in a relatively short period of time, achieving a huge impetus to the “renaissance” of this community.