Milestones, those markers that give meaning to our time on Earth, can occur through both careful planning and pleasant surprises. This year, our Annual Report is called – Milestones – because we have enjoyed our share of accomplishments this year. In this report you will read more about these efforts...

Selection of our One-Hundredth Niswonger Scholar
Five more Niswonger Scholar Alumni returning to the region to join other Alumni as they live their commitment to our vision – Learn, Earn, Return

Opening state-of-the-art professional development centers,
The Niswonger Foundation Learning Center and JOYful Literacy Land

The beginning of work on a third U.S. Department of Education grant, while showing success with the current eight-million-dollar Rural LIFE grant

Receipt of the first financial support from the State of Tennessee - two Direct Appropriations Grants totaling $600,000

11.4 percent increase in college-going rate in our service region since the inception of the NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising Program

34.8 percent increase in enrollment in Niswonger Online, with Advanced Placement course enrollment growing by 253 percent

These and other milestones mark the importance of the Foundation's history of working in partnership. These partnerships succeed because of an understanding that the difference in where we are now and where we need to find ourselves in the future will be greatly influenced by the quality of the educational experiences we provide to children.

Our most symbolic milestone, this year, was the move to the permanent home of the Niswonger Foundation – 223 North Main Street, Greeneville, Tennessee.

As an historic residence was transformed into the “home” for the Foundation, the process of unpacking boxes was both emotional and renewing. Photographs, paintings, furnishings and other memorabilia now share my forty-year journey that has led to the eighteen-year history of the Niswonger Foundation.

As a Scholar Alumni, Scott Niswonger’s philosophy, “Learn, Earn, Return” has begun to mean more to me. Twice now, I’ve had the honor of selecting new Niswonger Scholars while sitting in the same board room where I interviewed years ago. When I had the privilege of extending a job offer to a recent Niswonger graduate, it came full circle. It occurred to me in that moment that the Niswonger Foundation has reached the maturity that Scott envisioned.

Jason Light
Eastman Engineer
Niswonger Scholar Class of 2013

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Mission and Vision

The Niswonger Foundation functions with the belief that success comes by working in partnership. It is a belief in foundational support that allows the mission to "create opportunities for individual and community growth through education and other sustainable projects." The Niswonger Foundation's guiding principle is that all children should be provided an educational environment that supports and embraces their unique abilities.

Mission: The Niswonger Foundation is committed to the personal and professional development of teachers via job-embedded coaching and advance the learning of K-12 students aligned instructional coaching (IC) program to improve the effectiveness of classroom instruction, and provide at least nine AP courses.

Vision: The new home of the Niswonger Foundation proudly serves the region’s school systems with a state-of-the-art Learning Center and Literacy Library (JOYful Literacy Land).

2019 Grant Highlights

- The New Teacher Center selected the Niswonger Foundation as one of four state and national partners. Additionally, the Niswonger Foundation has drawn an impressive array of state and national partners.

2019 Grant Highlights

- The New Teacher Center selected the Niswonger Foundation as one of four districts in a 2019 United States Department of Education EIR grant. The purpose of this $4 million grant is to implement a high-quality, standards-based instructional coaching (IC) program to improve the effectiveness of teachers via job-embedded coaching and advance the learning of K-12 students in high-need rural and urban school districts.

- United States Department of Education – Completed year-two of an $8 million-dollar five-year Education, Research and Innovation (EIR) grant to improve middle grades literacy development. With a significant impact on students with customized professional development for teachers in grades six through eight, early success has been achieved with the development of individualized school and student plans.

- Walmart Foundation and Rural Schools and Community Trust – Completed the second year of a three-year, $10 million-dollar grant focusing on kindergarten through second grade literacy development in Hancock County. This initiative incorporates the concept of “place-based learning.” Early findings support the importance of professional development, provision of resources, modifications to class scheduling and following a data-driven approach.

- Care Foundation of America – Completed year-two of a $262,500 three-year grant for Workforce CARE Online, supporting “affiliate memberships” with the Niswonger Foundation for rural school systems across the State of Tennessee. Additional, there is a focus on ensuring that students are prepared to select the most appropriate career paths, and have the job skills needed for success in those chosen fields.

- Care Foundation of America, Brotherhood Foundation, First Tennessee Bank, and Scott M. Niswonger contributed a total of $74,000 in support of the NiswongerCARE College and Career Advising Program.

Partnership Highlights

- College and Career Advising – Students in thirty northeast Tennessee high schools receive the assistance of college and career advisers through the NiswongerCARE Program. Students receive direct guidance regarding financial aid via FAFSA, college applications, career exploration/planning, ACT test registration, scholarship searches, Tennessee Promise and Hope applications, and preparing for AP, dual enrollment, and Advanced Placement coursework. Successful findings support the Foundation’s belief in the importance of professional development, provision of resources, modifications to class scheduling and following a data-driven approach.

- Advanced Placement (AP) – For the fifth year, the Niswonger Foundation provided curriculum, technology, and teacher training to assist students with access to at least nine AP courses.

- School Success Symposium – United nearly 1000 educators to share the region’s best educational practices. The keynote speaker for the 2019 Symposium was Tennessee Commissioner of Education, Dr. Penny Schwinn. Special Guest Speaker was Dr. Robert Plax, Zeller, Director of Appreciative Education, Florida Atlantic University.

- CareerConnect – Completed the program’s third year for students in Greene County and Greeneville City Schools. This career and technology focused program is currently introducing 300 students to soft skills development, career choices and employment opportunities available in their communities. (The Magic of Words program) worked was expanded to a statewide program in 2019.

- For the seventeenth year, the Niswonger Foundation provided curriculum based Young People’s Symphony to over 200 students in partnership with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.

- Story Arts – is the focus of a partnership with the National Storytelling Center to provide live streaming of the International Storytelling Festival throughout the region and to countries around the world. Additionally, this partnership provides for teacher workshops to enhance classroom skills and provides access to storytelling events for underserved children.

- Literacy Development – In addition to the United States Department of Education Life REAP Grant and the Walmart Foundation/Rural School and Community Trust Funded (ROAR) Literacy Initiative, the Literacy Initiative Focused on Effectiveness (LIFE) at Greene County, the Literacy Development Project focused on increasing reading on grade level by third grade. Successful findings support the Foundation’s belief in the importance of professional development, provision of resources, modifications to class scheduling and following a data-driven approach.

- Professional Learning:
Milestone Moment...

With the selection of the Class of 2024, the number of individuals with the distinguished title of Niswonger Scholar surpassed One Hundred.

SCHOLARSHIP & LEADERSHIP

Eighteen Scholars are in fifteen different career paths.

Fifteen Alumni have completed graduate degrees.

Thirty-two Alumni have completed graduate degrees.

Fifteen Alumni are currently pursuing graduate programs of study.

The Niswonger Foundation has invested approximately $9,000,000 in the scholar program.

Milestone Moment... came as the first Niswonger Scholar medical doctor returned, this year, to serve the region.

Scott M. Niswonger’s vision to “Learn, Earn and Return” is the inspiration for the Scholarship and Leadership Program, which is believed to be unique to any other in the nation. Selected from among the region’s best and brightest high school seniors, Niswonger Scholars engage in a four-year, innovative, leadership development program that prepares them for their commitment to return to Northeast Tennessee as future leaders for the region. The Scholars are provided a scholarship to attend the college or university that can best prepare them for their chosen careers, extensive leadership development opportunities, and guidance to help them reach their personal best as future community leaders.

The vision has become reality with the impact of the Niswonger Scholarship Alumni who are meeting their commitment to return to Northeast Tennessee. The experiences and skills gained through Scholar Institutes, travel and personal development are now enriching their work as college professors, teachers, engineers, healthcare professionals, and non-profit professionals and community leaders, to name a few. In addition to their professional roles, Scholar Alumni serve the community in many ways including assisting as mentors to the younger Scholars, assisting with Scholar Leadership Institutes and as majority members in the Scholar selection process.

The Niswonger Foundation has invested approximately $9,000,000 in the scholar program allowing us to recruit the top students of our region and create a positive cycle of new opportunity. With every individual that commits to returning to our region and building a career, we strengthen a network that is dedicated to this community, improving access to education, business, healthcare, and the overall well-being of Northeast Tennessee.

The spirit and desire to “Learn, Earn, Return” is evident in the following comments from Kirby Shelton, Class of 2016, soon to complete a Master’s in Public Health. “There is no feeling better than walking into a patient’s room and hearing the names of those familiar ‘hollos’... Johnson City, Bristol, Church Hill, Flag Pond. No feeling, perhaps, except that of the satisfaction in a job well done.”

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“Returning to Northeast Tennessee was not only a commitment to the Foundation but a goal that structured my early career. How will the skills I’m developing and the knowledge I’m gaining as I teach in Washington, DC help me to better educate the youth of my region? I am so proud that I have the chance to impact our region by supporting teachers as they pursue their passions and fulfill their potential, just as my teachers supported me. This year, one of my former students was selected as a Scholar, and couldn’t help but feel that my “Learn, Earn, Return” promise has started to come to fruition 14 years later.”

A Milestone Moment came as the first Niswonger Scholar medical doctor returned, this year, to serve the region. Dr. Cole Staton, Class of 2009, attended Vanderbilt University and East Tennessee State University’s Quillen College of Medicine. “The Niswonger Scholarship program’s vision is equally ambitious and unique. Years ago, when applying for the program, I saw an opportunity to be a part of something special with the potential to have an indefinite impact on our region. I believe in the program’s vision more than ever, but its success requires a collective effort from Scholars to return and serve. I am excited to come home and do my part. I look forward to many others doing the same.”

Class of 2022

Makayla Davis (East Tennessee State University) Victor Dickerson (University of Tennessee – Knoxville) Aisling Hagan (University of Tennessee – Knoxville) Eric Seal (East Tennessee State University) John Turner (University of Tennessee – Knoxville)

Class of 2023

Sarah Haddad (East Tennessee State University – Martin) Alise Harvey (Tennessee Technological University) Janette Martin (University of Tennessee – Knoxville) Aubrie Strange (Samford University) Bethvak Yakturk (Tulane University)

Class of 2024

Meredith Wachs Stevens, Class of 2010, holds degrees from the College of William and Mary and from American University. She honors the Niswonger Scholarship educational mission as a classroom teacher at Grainger High School. Commenting on her experience as a Scholar, Meredith stated: “Returning to Northeast Tennessee was not only a commitment to the Foundation but a goal that structured my early career. How will the skills I’m developing and the knowledge I’m gaining as I teach in Washington, DC help me to better educate the youth of my region? I am so proud that I have the chance to impact our region by supporting teachers as they pursue their passions and fulfill their potential, just as my teachers supported me. This year, one of my former students was selected as a Scholar, and couldn’t help but feel that my “Learn, Earn, Return” promise has started to come to fruition 14 years later.”

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Contribution from Dr. Flora Joy Leads to “JOYful Literacy Land”

A distinguished professor of Reading and Language Arts at East Tennessee State University for forty years, Dr. Flora Joy has made a significant impact on education regionally, nationally and internationally. A member of the Clemmer College of Education Hall of Fame, recipient of both the Distinguished Professor of Teaching and Service, Dr. Joy founded the master’s degree program in Storytelling and Story Arts at ETSU. Dr. Joy holds the distinction of being the youngest graduate of East Tennessee State University.

Upon her retirement, the Niswonger Foundation became the proud recipient of Dr. Joy’s “treasure house” of resources for teaching English language arts, including a library of children’s literature. This generous contribution has led to the establishment of “JOYful Literacy Land,” housed at the new home of the Niswonger Foundation. Teachers, literacy specialists and, most importantly, students will be greatly served by Dr. Joy’s generosity for many years to come.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

June 30, 2019

ASSETS

Cash $ 393,724
Restricted Cash 371,531
Program Accounts Receivable 54,450
Federal Grants Receivable 56,263
Investments 8,095,539
Prepaid Expenses and Other Assets 600
Student Loans Receivable 484,688
Collections 101,861
Property and Equipment 4,034,033

Total Assets $ 14,592,685

LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable and other Accrued Liabilities $ 431,709
Line of Credit 484,688
Demand Notes Payable to Primary Benefactor 1,136,826

Total Liabilities $ 2,800,347

NET ASSETS

Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions $ 11,438,713
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions 325,622

TOTAL NET ASSETS 11,792,338

$ 14,592,685

DONOR HIGHLIGHT

The mission of the Niswonger Foundation is firmly placed in the First Congressional District of Northeast Tennessee. The leadership of the Niswonger Foundation recognizes the need for engagement in ensuring quality educational opportunities in Tennessee and nationally. As examples, staff members are represented as Board Members, and among the leadership, of the following organizations:

- Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC)
- Tennessee Independent Colleges and University Associations (TICUA) Board
- State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) Board and Advisory Committees
- Tennessee for Quality Early Education (TQEE) Board
- Governor’s Early Literacy Task Force (TLC)
- ETSU Alumni Association

The Niswonger Foundation distributed $ 2,788,055.00 to educational programs and scholarship awards in fiscal year 2019. As an example of the grants provided, and in keeping with our theme of “milestones,” we are proud to highlight the ten-year of support that the Niswonger Foundation has provided to the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee. This year’s contribution will provide a full-year of nutritious food for children in Hancock and Hawkins Counties through the weekend Backpack Program.

As an operating foundation, the majority of Niswonger Foundation funding is directed to our own programs – School Partnerships and Scholarship and Leadership. The Foundation values the opportunity to direct up to ten percent of the operating budget to other projects that are in keeping with the organization’s mission. As noted, a primary focus for this support targets the needs of underserved children.

In Northeast Tennessee, as across the United States, one-half of public school children live in poverty. As an example of the grants provided, and in keeping with our theme of “milestones,” we are proud to highlight the ten years of support that the Niswonger Foundation has provided to the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee. This year’s contribution will provide a full-year of nutritious food for children in Hancock and Hawkins Counties through the weekend Backpack Program.

Leadership of the Niswonger Foundation includes the following:

- Scott M. Niswonger, President and CEO
- Scott M. Niswonger, Board Chair
- Mark Stites, Vice President of Operations
- Charles Koch
- John Scott
- Tammy Wilson
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THE NISWONGER FOUNDATION was founded by businessman and philanthropist Scott M. Niswonger. Unlike most private foundations, the Niswonger Foundation was established as an operating foundation with its own programs and projects. The Foundation is also approved as a charitable organization. Although a percentage of its operating funds go towards grant making, most funds go into projects. The Foundation’s two primary programs – a scholarship and leadership program for selected college students committed to returning to the region and partnership programs for schools.
**NISWONGER FOUNDATION PHILOSOPHY**

The Niswonger Foundation was established in 2001 to make a positive and sustainable difference in education in Northeast Tennessee. This dream was envisioned by Scott M. Niswonger, who founded Landair Transport, Inc. and Forward Air Corporation. These companies were the first two Greeneville-based companies to be taken public in the history of Greene County, Tennessee. Jointly, the companies have combined annual revenue of over one-billion-dollars and employ more than 5000 people.

With the success of his two companies, the philosophy of "Learn - Earn - Return" was created. Using the innovative model of having a private, for-profit logistics company, Landair Transport, support a not-for-profit educational foundation, the goal of bringing rigorous, relevant, and cost effective programs to public education became a mission.

School Partnerships are designed for the specific challenges of rural education. Fundamental to the success of the Niswonger Foundation has been a clear focus on removing constraints to educational innovation and problem solving, thus allowing local school systems to better provide for student needs. These efforts have gained national attention resulting in the receipt of two significant grants from the U.S. Department of Education and numerous other national organizations.

We know of no other Scholarship and Leadership program like ours in the United States. Niswonger Scholars are selected through a nomination process that seeks to identify the region's best and brightest future leaders. Scholars are given the opportunity to attend the college or university that will best prepare them for success in their field of study, while participating in our four year leadership program. What makes our program unique is that these students commit to returning to Northeast Tennessee to work in their chosen career, one year for each year they receive the scholarship.

The Niswonger Foundation expands its philosophy of "Learn - Earn - Return" beyond Northeast Tennessee through involvement in numerous state and national educational initiatives. Additionally, the Foundation shares a percentage of the operating funds for grants to other not-for-profit agencies for programs that support the Foundation’s mission: 

> "To create opportunities for individual and community growth through education and other sustainable projects."
For More Information Contact:

Niswonger Foundation
223 North Main Street
P.O. Box 1508
Greeneville Tennessee 37744
(423) 820-8181
www.niswongerfoundation.org