

Scott Barbeau, Rich Johnson, and Dan Marcus at the 2026 Fall Gala

INSIDE THIS EDITION

Tools for Learning, Pathways to the Future

Meeting Needs Today, Building Stability for Tomorrow

Skill Building & Empowerment in Nicaragua & Mexico

Fall Gala Highlights

Honoring the Past, Investing in the Future

One Vision. Four Partners. Lasting Sustainable Impact.

A Note from our Co-Founders
Scott Barbeau & Rich Johnson, Board Members | Dan Marcus, Director Emeritus

Last month we gathered for Spark's Fall Gala, a night that celebrated a belief at the heart of our work: lasting impact begins with partnership. Built on trust and shared purpose, our partnerships grow into deep, lasting relationships that fuel life-changing work.

We saw this come to life in the stories our event speakers shared: a Grade 12 graduate now studying at university, a young man learning to express his emotions, a community uplifted by access to essential resources, and a woman empowered with new skills and a steady income.

Speaking on behalf of the Co-Founders, Dan reflected, *"It's clear that we have come a long way. Through Spark, we've made an immeasurable impact on countless lives. We're deeply humbled and blessed that so many have joined us in this vital mission. It has brought true human connection across the globe, with so many friends generously committing time, talent, and resources."*

Across Zambia, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Chicago, our partners bring local knowledge and an unwavering commitment to addressing the challenges their communities face. Your support helps them put that knowledge into action by connecting education, essential services, and practical skills-building with their goals and aspirations.

Twenty years ago, the idea of partnership was born on a journey to Zambia, and it continues to guide everything we do. Thank you for investing in the people leading positive change in their own communities and for helping sustain their work for years to come.

With gratitude,
Scott, Rich, and Dan

Tools for Learning, Pathways to the Future

Hope Community School — Zambia



At Hope Community School, reliable technology is giving teachers new ways to teach and students new ways to learn. Every teacher now has a laptop, classrooms have the equipment needed to share lessons, and expanded Wi-Fi coverage makes internet connections more dependable.

The library now has ten new laptops in addition to the existing desktops. A new local server gives learners access to typing practice, digital books, and supplemental educational lessons. These tools support programs that help students strengthen the research, writing, and digital skills they'll need as they build pathways beyond the classroom.

The importance of these skills has become clear as alumni begin to navigate their university studies. Hope continues to support them as they adjust to the more rigorous demands of university life.





"At Hope, my teachers believed in me and helped me believe in myself. I was proud to be part of Hope's first Grade 12 graduating class, and I'm now studying nursing at university. My story shows that when you invest in a young person's potential, they can make a lasting difference."

— Norah Nkhani, Fall Gala Speaker

Meeting Needs Today, Building Stability for Tomorrow

We Grow Chicago — United States



In West Englewood, We Grow Chicago meets immediate needs while helping residents build lasting stability. Through Englewood Strong, residents can access essential supplies, customized case management, and learning opportunities. This support can mean meals, a path forward, and fewer barriers to the future they envision for themselves and their families.

This year, Englewood Strong **created stability for 287 residents**, completing 565 deliveries, serving nearly 1,000 meals to fight food insecurity, and distributing more than 2,500 kits filled with essential items everyone needs but not everyone can always afford.

We Grow Chicago is also a story of investing in leaders. Hannah Jackson began on the Peace Campus as an intern and went on to become the campus's first full-time staff member. Five years later, she leads Englewood Strong as the Program Manager.



"Behind the numbers are real people and real relationships. We're making sure our neighbors know they have someone they can count on when they need it. You are investing in people. I know the impact of that investment because I am standing here as a result of it."

— Hannah Jackson, Fall Gala Speaker

Building Skills and Strengthening Well-Being

Las Tías — Nicaragua

This summer at Las Tías, six women earned government certifications after completing a 45-day manicure and pedicure course, joining graduates of a bisutería (jewelry-making) course. Together, they're the first cohort to earn government-recognized credentials through Las Tías, advancing its 30+ year commitment of equipping the community with practical, marketable skills.







Preparing for the future also means caring for the whole person. Each month, dozens of psychology sessions address topics such as anxiety, sadness, and family dynamics. Through a partnership with a government agency, workshops on the rights and well-being of children and women are offered, covering subjects from family violence to healthy eating habits. Las Tías is empowering students with the skills and confidence to navigate challenges and pursue new possibilities.

For Marcos, that support has had a deep impact.



"The psychologist at Las Tías has helped me better understand my emotions and talk through conflicts at home and the things I am feeling. I've learned how to manage my emotions, improve my attitude, and have more confidence in myself."
— Marcos, 16, Fall Gala Speaker



Marcos (center) receives food to take home from Las Tías' pantry program.

Sustainable Savings and Empowered Entrepreneurs

Entreamigos — Mexico

At Entreamigos, sustainability is taking shape in many forms, from solar panels powering the community center to local women building their own businesses.

An expanded solar panel system, funded by the John & Susan Dewan Foundation, has dramatically reduced utility expenses. A recent electricity bill came to just 77 pesos (about $4 USD), down from previous bills of up to $500 USD. Those savings are being invested in programs that empower women, children, and families in the community.

That same commitment to sustainability is reflected in the Women Entrepreneurs group. Members recently completed a five-day digital marketing workshop, building skills to promote and grow their ventures on their own. For Julia, the program has offered far more than new skills.



"Selling what I make with my hands makes me feel empowered. I used to be shy and insecure. If I fail, I know it is all part of learning, and I feel more at ease and secure."
— Julia Cortez, Fall Gala Speaker

Honoring the Past, Investing in the Future





This fall, we "Honored the Past and Invested in the Future" at our SOLD-OUT Fall Gala.

Over $340,000 raised!

Your generosity is a true investment in our partners' futures, as they continue expanding access to education, nutrition, healthcare, and employment for years to come.

Recognizing Extraordinary Commitment within the Spark Community



Global Service Award | Stacy Wells

This award honors those who exemplify our core values: Collaborative Relationships, Social Responsibility, Mutual Accountability, Deep Humility, and Human Dignity.

Stacy was a member of Spark's first Board, has traveled to our international partners, hosted fundraising events, introduced countless people to Spark, and recently rejoined our Board. Congratulations, Stacy!



Twatotela "Thank You" Award | Kathy "Bupe" Wolf

At Hope, Spark travelers who visit ten times receive a Zambian name. This summer, Kathy was named "Bupe," meaning "a person who is a gift and a blessing."

Kathy and her husband, Charlie, have invested in classrooms, the orphanage, scholarships, operations, and the land that is now the school farm. She creates Hope's cherished yearbooks and has introduced countless people to Spark. Twatotela, Bupe!

Honoring the Past with Special Guests Mama Lilian Mulando & Kalunga Mumba

Mama Lilian hosted Spark's Co-Founders on that first trip twenty years ago, proudly saying, "Spark was born in my house!" She's watched Hope grow from 70 students to a thriving campus where some graduates are now going on to university.

Kalunga, daughter of Hope's co-founders, joined her to thank guests for years of partnership and the lasting impact she's witnessed firsthand.



Pictured left to right: Kalunga, Michelle Rashad, and Mama Lilian.

Welcoming New Leadership & Looking Ahead

Stacy Wells & Elizabeth Kent

We're pleased to welcome our newest board members, Stacy Wells and Elizabeth Kent! We're grateful for their commitment and look forward to the experience and leadership they'll bring to Spark.

As we begin our next chapter, we remain committed to listening to local leaders, staying engaged, and investing in community-led opportunities.

Visit our Partners with Us!

Engage with community leaders and see our partners' work firsthand.

Chicago Unity Day	May 01, 2027
Zambia	July 18 - 27, 2027
Mexico	November 4 - 7, 2027
Zambia	July 9 - 18, 2028