



*Communities of*  
**COASTAL GEORGIA FOUNDATION**

**THE SEED THAT BEGAN IT ALL**

by Valerie Hepburn, President & CEO Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation



**L**ast November, the St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation awarded more than \$800,000 in grants to support children, families and communities across

Coastal Georgia. This grant cycle, which occurs twice a year, serves to catalyze and sustain many of the non-profits serving Glynn County and the islands. The birth and maturation of the St. Marys United Methodist Church

Foundation is the one of the nation's great stories of philanthropy.

Folks in St. Marys, Georgia knew that Warren Bailey had done well for himself. Yet, when the local businessman passed away in July 2000, it is safe to say that everyone in the community was in awe of both his resources and his incredible generosity. His will identified St. Marys United Methodist Church as the primary beneficiary of his estate, which when settled amounted to some \$60 million. And, the bequest came to the Church with no restrictions or strings attached. One local

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With such a sizeable unrestricted gift, just imagine what your church or charitable organization might do? Certainly, a new sanctuary might be in order; a home for the minister; a host of new equipment and programs; at minimum, a new, taller steeple. Yet, St. Marys United Methodist Church did none of these things. Instead, the recipients of this incredible, surprise gift transformed themselves into philanthropists, forming the St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation. By endowing the funds, the Foundation, the largest in Southeast Georgia, ensured the philanthropy would be lasting and permanent.

Since 2001, St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation has granted over \$20 million to more than 100 organizations across the Coastal Georgia region and around the globe. As would be expected, some of the grant funds have gone to support Methodist organizations and causes. Much of the Foundation's investments, however, have gone to support secular and non-denominational efforts focused on improving quality of life and strengthening communities, even outside of Camden County. Coastal Georgia has benefited in many ways – from the United Way's Graduation Blueprint and Communities in Schools

to the College's Service-Learning Program, from expansion of The Gathering Place and support to a new distribution center for MAP International, from supporting at-risk kids at Safe Harbor Children's Home to improving end-of-life care through Hospice of the Golden Isles. And, the list goes on and on. This group's belief in the importance of permanent community philanthropy is evidenced further by their ongoing participation as a founder of the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation.

The Foundation has been stewarded by a rotating board comprised primarily of St. Marys United Methodist Church members, most of whom live in Camden County. Each member has served with a collective mission beyond himself or herself, or the community of St. Marys, Georgia. They have been guided by their selfless, spiritual beliefs and their vision of an improved quality of life for people in Southeast Georgia, the nation and the world.

The altruism of the original donor lives through the St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation and each of its many grant recipients. Good deeds, good works, good stewardship represent the ultimate goodwill to others. And, it all began with one generous local businessman and a congregation of visionaries.

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