

## Jennie Schaff ready to be changemaker for Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation

By [Andrea Deckhart](#) December 30, 2021

When changing jobs, it is not unusual for some people to take time in between to regroup and prepare for the next challenge. That thinking does not apply to Jennie Schaff.

Schaff will join the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation on Jan. 1 as the organization's CEO, almost immediately after her final day as president and CEO of Jewish Family Services, a role in which she served for over three years.

"I'm thrilled for the opportunity and excited to get started," she said.

The Foundation began its search for its next leader when Holli Budd announced her retirement in April. The nationwide search for a successor drew 235 applicants.

Schaff was unanimously approved for the position by the Foundation's board of trustees in October.

The Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation is a private charitable foundation established in 1988 by Max and Marian Farash dedicated to the civic and religious communities of its founders who believed in the importance of education and knew the power of entrepreneurial creativity.

It strives to make long-term and meaningful contributions in Monroe and Ontario Counties with half of its grants supporting Jewish Life and the other half supporting secular activities with a large emphasis on urban education.

Since its transition to a professionally staffed organization in 2011, the Foundation has invested more than \$90 million in grants and program support, and its assets total more than \$300 million. The Foundation has a staff of 11 and an annual operating budget of roughly \$3 million.

The Foundation has been recognized for its efforts. Most recently it was named outstanding foundation by the Association of Fundraising Professionals,



Genesee Valley Chapter as part of its National Philanthropy Day Awards in November.

Schaff believes her professional experience — particularly her broad awareness of community issues related to education, affordable housing and food insecurities — will be an asset to the Foundation.

"It can help serve as a foundation for my own vision moving forward," she said.

Schaff's career path to her upcoming role is somewhat untraditional.

She originally thought she would attend medical school and did go on to pursue medical training, although in a different discipline.

After graduating from Brighton High School in the early 1990s, Schaff attended Simmons University in Boston where she received bachelor's and master's degrees in physical therapy.

As a physical therapist, Schaff worked with children with severe disabilities in the Washington D.C. area.

During that time, she saw inequities in the field, largely around the technology available in the industry and knowledge of the use of that technology.

It was then when her focus shifted to education.

"I fell in love with education," she said.

Schaff earned her Ph.D. in education from George Mason University in 2002.

She spent nearly 20 years as a professor, 13 of which were at Nazareth College, where she helped to shape K-12 educators in Rochester and Monroe County and gained a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities within the current educational system.

The work she did at Nazareth allowed for a natural transition to her next professional endeavor at Jewish Family Services, where she has been able to combine her experience in education with work related to social injustice and civic engagement.

For over 100 years, Jewish Family Services has provided social services to families and individuals in Rochester, more than half of whom are non-Jewish.

The agency offers a variety of programs, including mental health services, affordable housing and essential services that address needs such as food and clothing.

During Schaff's tenure, the organization grew by over 40 percent with respect to its staff and budget.

Since Jewish Family Services is one of the Foundation's grantees, Schaff has been in touch with the Foundation on a regular basis over the years, particularly with respect to the organization's mental health initiatives.

She believes the relationship gave her a good understanding of the grantmaking process, including the importance of measurable results and accountability.

At the onset of her new role, Schaff will spend the bulk of her time listening to both staff and community partners, to not only get a good idea of where the Foundation has been, but where it will next be going.

Schaff praised Budd for her accomplishments at the Foundation.

"She built a solid foundation on which I feel I can build upon," Schaff said, adding that the Foundation staff has also been key in its success.

The Farash Foundation recently completed its 10-year strategic plan and is in the process of formally rolling it out.

As CEO, Schaff will work to ensure the efficiency of the Foundation's operations, evolve its approach to philanthropy, elevate its process for measuring and demonstrating impact and deepen its partnerships throughout the community.

Moving forward, Schaff says an emphasis will be on making the Foundation more transparent and accessible as a grant maker, clarifying the processes and policies as well as the priorities.

Her goal is collaboration both inside the Foundation and with other organizations outside of it.

"To really make change we all need to work together," Schaff said.

Thomas Jackson, chair of the Foundation's board of trustees, said Schaff is the right person to further the Foundation's focus.

"Jennie's background and expertise is a remarkable fit with the Foundation, particularly, but not exclusively, in the areas of the Jewish community and K-12 education," Jackson said.

Daan Braveman, who led the search committee and is chair-elect of the Foundation's board of trustees, describes Schaff as an engaging leader with an infectious personality.

Braveman and Schaff crossed professional paths at Nazareth, where he served as president when Schaff was on the faculty there.

"(Her) experience with programs that improve the quality of education, address issues of poverty and promote a vibrant Jewish community make her an exceptional fit for the Foundation and this role," he said.

Schaff lives in Brighton with her three children, her husband, David Clar, and his two sons. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, writing and running.

On the job, Schaff is excited to start a new path in the New Year.

"I'm grateful every second that this is what I'm walking into," she says.

### **Jennie Schaff**

**TITLE:** Incoming CEO, Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation

**EDUCATION:** Ph.D., education, George Mason University, 2002; B.S. and M.S. degrees in physical therapy, Simmons University, 1955 and 1997.

**RESIDENCE:** Brighton

**FAMILY:** Husband David Clar, three children and two stepchildren

**HOBBIES:** Reading, writing, running

**QUOTE:** "To really make change we all need to work together."