Valerie Grimm agrees. “Who better to count on than your fellow citizens? Contributors and fundholders can feel secure that their funds are distributed with proper vetting by caring, compassion people just like themselves.”

**Step 1: “All things considered”**

A glance at the 2012 discretionary grants for southeast Connecticut shows a rich diversity among arts & culture, education & civic affairs, and social services & health.

“We don’t pit one issue against another, say a dance program versus homelessness,” says Grimm. “Each project is considered on its own merits. Anybody who has an idea, a program, or an aspiration can write a proposal, and we’ll take a look at it. There’s a beauty to that. I think.

“Truth is, one of the most exciting results of this open attitude is we frequently discover a whole panoply of organizations that we never knew about. I say to myself, ‘Wow, a lot of people are doing good things in eastern Connecticut!’”

**Discovering magic on the site visit**

Art Tanner, who ran a packaging manufacturing company for 30 years, went on his first site visits last year. He was armed with the Community Foundation’s 12-point questionnaire, the nonprofit’s application, budget, and plenty of paperwork. But the site visit made all the difference.

“You hear their passion, why they believe in their project versus homeless-against another, say a dance program versus homelessness,” says Grimm. “I get to watch new projects as the Cape Cod Foundation. I get to watch new people come back from their site visits so excited about someone they talked to, about becoming aware of the breadth of what’s out there.

“You feel good about what’s going on in the community.”

**The final step: choosing grantees**

Both Grimm and Tanner describe the final choice of grantees as cooperative and congenial.

“It’s fairly easy to reach consensus,” says Tanner. “People make a good case for the nonprofits they were assigned, whether ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘maybe’. We usually only have a ‘tug of war’ over one or two.”

Grimm adds, “Alice (Fitzpatrick) and Jennifer set the stage for us. We warn the nonprofits to have reasonable expectations.”

Despite the caution, and thanks to $240,000 in additional dollars from donor advisors (see page xx), Grimm’s committee was able to choose 87 projects and distribute $625,000 in 2012.

“Not bad for ‘average Joes’ off the street, just like you,” she laughs.

Your neighbors put their stamp on competitive grants

Valerie Grimm and Art Tanner have very important jobs at the Community Foundation. Wearing their CFECT “hats”, they are welcomed as VIPs by almost any nonprofit in southeast Connecticut. And they and their colleagues play a key role in directing hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants to those same organizations.

We talk with Valerie Grimm and Art Tanner, two of dozens of volunteers who help choose the best nonprofits and projects to fund each year. It’s a win-win situation for all involved.