

Our founders

Ed Lowe invented Kitty Litter, the country's first cat box filler, in 1947 and went on to develop Tidy Cat and other brands. This simple product led to the creation of an entirely new industry, one that now generates more than \$3 billion in U.S. sales. By the time Ed sold Edward Lowe Industries in 1990, the company had grown to about 600 employees and \$165 million in annual sales.

Darlene Lowe, Ed's wife, was also a successful entrepreneur. A talented artist, Darlene operated an interior design business, along with Haymarket Antiques and Designs Inc., a retail business that sold antiques and home accessories. She is responsible for creating the distinctive look at Big Rock Valley, the foundation's home in southwest Michigan.

Together Ed and Darlene launched the Edward Lowe Foundation in 1985. Upon Ed's death in 1995, Darlene assumed leadership of the foundation as chairman and CEO.



Mission and vision

Ed and Darlene wanted to advocate entrepreneurship as a strategy for economic growth and community development — and provide entrepreneurs with greater support and resources.

The Edward Lowe Foundation is an operating foundation, which uses its endowment to run its own programs, as opposed to giving grants.

During its early years, the foundation experimented with a variety of entrepreneurship initiatives — from mentoring programs for college students to policy conferences and publishing venues. By the late 1990s, it began to focus on second-stage growth companies — entrepreneurs who have made it beyond startup and have the capacity and desire for sustainable growth.

Why second stage?

Second-stage companies have 10 to 99 employees and between \$1 million and \$50 million in annual revenue, although these are loose boundaries.

Second-stage companies are significant job creators. Between 2003 and 2017, second-stagers represented about 17 percent of U.S. establishments, but generated 37 percent of all jobs and nearly 36 percent of sales.

In addition, second-stagers typically:

- Have national or international markets.
- Are introducing innovations that impact their industries.
- Have stability and deeper pockets that enable them to offer more diverse, high-quality jobs.
- Are devoted corporate citizens.

Timeline

1985 — Ed and Darlene Lowe establish the Edward Lowe Foundation, which initially awards grants to higher-ed institutions for research on various challenges that entrepreneurs face.

1991 — The foundation shifts from being a grant-giving institution to an operating structure, which enables it to create and run its own programs.

1995 — Ed Lowe dies on Oct. 4, and Darlene assumes leadership of the foundation as chairman and CEO.

1996-1997 — A formal program of Innovative environmental practices is introduced at BRV.

1998-2000 — The foundation narrows its focus on second-stage entrepreneurs.

2001-2003 — Leader retreats at BRV gain traction, and the PeerSpectives Roundtable System launches.

2005 — The first Companies to Watch recognition program kicks off in Michigan.

2009 — The foundation partners with a consortium of zoos to conduct demographic and habitat research on the eastern massasauga rattlesnake species.

2010 — The Tower of Tomorrow opens, expanding the Billieville retreat center.

2012 — A new 13,000-square-foot headquarters building opens, replacing a facility that burned in a 2011 fire.

2017 — A virtual version of the PeerSpectives Roundtable System begins in November, on the heels of a successful beta test in the spring.

2019 — A new entrepreneurship program, The System for Integrated Growth (SIG), makes its official debut.

Entrepreneurship

Key programs within our entrepreneurship division include:

- **Leader retreats** — Held at the foundation's headquarters in southwest Michigan, these retreats help both second-stage leaders and their employees with strategic direction and leadership development.
- **The System for Integrated Growth®** — A virtual program, SIG gives second-stage CEOs access to a SWAT team of business experts to help address issues impacting growth. Vetted by the foundation, SIG specialists provide information and best practices to help CEOs strengthen company infrastructure, enter new markets and find new customers
- **PeerSpectives®** — A unique CEO roundtable methodology (available in both virtual and in-person formats), PeerSpectives enhances participants' leadership abilities and improves decision-making. The program stresses sharing experiences rather than giving advice.
- **Companies to Watch®** — An awards program that recognizes high-performing second-stagers. The program is currently conducted in Colorado, Florida and Michigan.



Land stewardship

Ed had a great love of the land, and the foundation also has a mission of land stewardship, which is carried out at Big Rock Valley (BRV), our headquarters property in southwest Michigan.

BRV draws its name from the large number of boulders left by receding glaciers from the Ice Age. The property began with a 160-acre parcel that Ed purchased in 1964, and over the years he continued to purchase adjacent land. Today BRV has more than 2,000 acres of woodland, farmland, wetland and prairie.

Due to its different landscapes and ecosystems, BRV is home to more than 700 plant varieties, 100 bird species and 30 varieties of amphibians and reptiles. Many are listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern.

To maintain BRV's unusual biodiversity, we have a number of land stewardship initiatives, such as prairie restoration, prescribed burns and old growth woodlands. We also make the property available to academic researchers. By using BRV as a living laboratory, we hope to broaden the knowledge base of conservation science.

