The subdued mood at The Cleveland Foundation as the summer of 1987 drew to a close could be discerned from the theme of the annual staff retreat, a time reserved for the professional staff to deliberate without being interrupted by meetings and ringing phones. The traditional three-day getaway to a location far removed from the Foundation’s offices was to be entirely devoted to the pressing matter of “The Allocation of Scarce Resources.”

In the months following the announcement of the Special Initiatives, a trend had become clear. The Foundation’s willingness to invest millions of dollars in two civic ventures it deemed of critical importance had only served to increase community expectations of it. Already other grant seekers were anticipating a similar level of commitment, one example being Case Western Reserve University, where a new president had recently taken office. The Foundation had received indications that the college would soon be seeking a multimillion-dollar grant for new presidential initiatives to combat plummeting undergraduate enrollment and erosion of federal support for its scientific research. Because Steve Minter had been one of a handful of outsiders asked to advise the university’s search committee on its selection of a president and had participated in the decision to hire former Dartmouth College provost Agnar Pytte to rebuild CWRU—a challenge that had serious implica-
tions for the continued economic recovery of Cleveland—the Foundation could hardly ignore any reasonable request from Pytte for assistance.

For three days in late August the program staff addressed the question of how to balance the rising tide of demands with what now seemed very limited resources. There were some obvious answers. Greater scrutiny of the quality and feasibility of requests was suggested, as was a stricter adherence to a stated policy of not funding operating costs of established agencies or supporting debt-reduction or capital programs. But Minter came away from the discussion sessions convinced that a more disciplined approach was needed than the informal policing that had been suggested. He asked associate director Susan Lajoie to begin working with the program officers to set annual quotas on their use of unrestricted dollars. By retreat’s end, he had also reached another conclusion: A principal distribution was an administrative imperative.

Useful as staff retreats now were in prompting The Cleveland Foundation to make mid-course adjustments, they had become a regular annual event only during Homer Wadsworth’s tenure. There had been precious little time for self-examination at The Cleveland Foundation before his coming, given a two-person staff too swamped to review the outcome of even the most important projects and grants. For that reason the Ford Foundation’s 1966 evaluation of the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation stands as the only formal analysis of the GCAF’s first few years of work.

Ford’s generally positive appraisal of the philanthropic demonstration project contained one small but troublesome note of caution: Now that the Associated Foundation had carved out a useful role as catalyst, convener and civic leader, the temporary status of its existence and the finite nature of its resources must somehow be addressed. Otherwise GCAF would have to close down its widely valued operations when it ran out of funds. The prospect of that disappointing day had already prompted Kent Smith and Dolph Norton to take actions that would not only strengthen the practice of philanthropy in Cleveland, but change the complexion of the community foundation movement in America.

Prepared in order to determine whether to renew its grant, Ford’s prescient evaluation was based on a detailed summary of all GCAF grants, which had been submitted by the GCAF staff, as well as inter-
views Ford had conducted during a three-day site visit to Cleveland in early December 1965. The GCAF staff summary was heavy on statistics. It reported that, as of October 1965, $1,808,096 had been dispersed in 52 separate grants.¹

Ford’s own evaluation dealt more with the significance of the Associated Foundation’s work. It read, in part:

The Associated Foundation has done a remarkable job in a short time of establishing itself from scratch as an organization of stature and influence in Cleveland. It is not widely known in the community, but it is known by the people who count. We heard an impressive amount of testimony as to the role it has played in awakening Cleveland business, intellectual and civic leaders to various crises in their metropolitan affairs and to the necessity of doing something about these problems. The type of philanthropy it represents seems widely to be regarded as a valuable, perhaps essential addition to the Cleveland scene.

. . . Norton has gained universal and high respect among leaders in Cleveland civic affairs for his ability to generate ideas or to help in their generation, and to devise means of getting them translated into action.

. . . We have heard his praises sung by a wide range of people in business, local government, education, and the Negro community. The general tenor of these comments is that Norton is a man with a comprehensive knowledge of Cleveland’s problems and an extraordinary flair for thinking up imaginative ways of attacking these problems or of helping other people develop their own ideas about what to do about them. A notable characteristic of many of the projects he has developed or helped develop is that they involve lots of people, including people of influence in the community, and by this means they have created an awareness on the part of community leaders of Cleveland’s problems and the necessity of doing something about them to a degree that many people do not believe existed before the Associated Foundation came on the scene.

The favorable review assured the Associated Foundation’s continued operation, but only through the end of the decade. In 1966, the Ford Foundation formally renewed its grant, awarding GCAF a second $1.25 million to be reallocated within five years.

Four years earlier, in April 1962, at the same time that they had paid out their original grant to the Associated Foundation, the trustees of the soon-to-be-liquidated Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Fund had handed over another $1.25 million for its second five years. Because the Hanna monies had long been assured, Ford’s evaluators observed, “the Associated Foundation’s Board has . . . taken a relaxed view of the future. We
queried the Board as to what would happen when the next five years were up, and it was clear that this was a matter that had not given the Board members much concern. . . . When queried, however, they rallied to the cause and said—as nearly as we could tell quite sincerely—that the Associated Foundation represented an effort that must not and would not be allowed to die."

Behind the scenes, Dolph Norton and Kent Smith were already moving on a plan to ensure the continuation of the Associated Foundation's work after its funding dried up. The plan was based on an idea that had been in the backs of their minds since GCAF's creation. Why not merge the Associated Foundation's operation with that of The Cleveland Foundation? After all, had the Associated Foundation not been established to set an example of philanthropic experimentation and innovation for the munificently endowed but traditionally run older organization? To be sure, The Cleveland Foundation had backed several of the younger foundation's projects, though that had been the extent to which the GCAF had influenced the Foundation's grantmaking. Since The Cleveland Foundation's executive director, Kim Johnson, would be celebrating his 65th birthday in 1966, didn't it make sense for Johnson to retire and for the energetic, experienced and visionary Associated Foundation staff to be brought in to tackle all The Cleveland Foundation's grantmaking? Of course, there was the unresolved matter of what would happen to the trustees of both foundations, but couldn't they theoretically be merged into one larger board?

This was roughly the scenario Norton proposed to John Sherwin, Sr., who had succeeded Ellwood Fisher as Cleveland Foundation chairman. Norton had made a point of keeping Sherwin, who had become head of the Distribution Committee in 1963, periodically apprised of the younger foundation's work and objectives, and in a confidential memo dated January 10, 1965, he had suggested to Sherwin that The Cleveland Foundation and the Associated Foundation form a new, more broadly representative foundation in the name of improving the quality of local civic leadership.

As Norton explained it in the memo to Sherwin, the new foundation would "provide the splintered leadership of Cleveland with a . . . base that currently does not exist [where] the major policy issues facing the city can be discussed among peers, choices can be made, and action can be initiated with the support of very substantial philanthropic resources
and good staff.” He recommended that the boards of both foundations be merged and supplemented with “at least one Negro, a woman in addition to Mrs. [Royal] Firman [Jr., then filling the single slot on the Distribution Committee it was unofficially agreed would always be reserved for a woman], and at least one younger person from outside the ranks of those usually considered for such posts.” Norton’s suggestion to include outsiders in the private meetings of such an elite group—whose monthly deliberations were held at the white business community’s exclusive Union Club in downtown Cleveland—was as pioneering as the Apollo space program then under way to land a human on the moon.

For the chair of the new foundation, Norton diplomatically proposed a member in good standing of the traditional power structure, either Kent Smith or John Sherwin himself: “It was the hard work of Kent Smith that provided the vital force in the development of the Associated Foundation and I could imagine no better person. However, Kent [who was then 70] has already given the tremendous effort to get one new organization under way. I would urge you to take the post at the outset if you feel your business commitments would permit it.” However, in the same memo, Norton also lobbied for his real preference for chairman: Carter Kissell, the head of BICCA’s subcommittee on housing, whom Norton favored because Kissell was retiring from business in 1965 and could theoretically devote himself to the job full-time.

“[Kissell] is an excellent person, widely respected in business circles and skilled in the patient, firm tactfulness that is so effective in civic leadership in Cleveland,” Norton observed in the memo. “If he would take this post for about two years he might establish it as a civic honor and duty that could cap the career[s] of newly retired business executives and give us a tradition of leadership such as we sorely need.”

Norton had gone on in his memo to explain that the operation should be organized as three divisions headed by “foundation associates” who reported to the president: the Community Development division, concerned with the fields of health and welfare, education, public service, metropolitan affairs and race relations; the Physical Development division, concerned with the fields of city planning, urban renewal, transportation, housing and economic development; and the Foundation Development division, concerned with such internal staff functions as finance, asset development and services to other foundations.
Norton envisioned a small staff—about seven professionals in all, supported by an appropriate number of clerical persons. He recommended that there be at least one training position filled on an annual basis and two or three posts for summer interns. In an era when the majority of community foundations had either no full-time employees or only one, Norton's vision for a professional staff hierarchy was novel and progressive. But would the 64-year-old Sherwin agree to any of it?

A lesser person might have been unwilling to share the prestige and power that accompanied membership in the most exclusive club in Cleveland, the five-member Distribution Committee. But Sherwin came from a long line of civic leaders, most notably his aunt, Belle Sherwin, who, like him, had served on the Distribution Committee (1917–24); and he personified the tradition of noblesse oblige. During his rise to chair of Cleveland's Pickands Mather and Company, one of the four largest iron ore producers in the country, John Sherwin had found time to be a member of the board of organizations as diverse as the Horace Kelly Art Foundation, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and the Cleveland Clinic Foundation (he would ultimately serve as a trustee of the internationally known medical center for a record 57 years).

In October 1961 he had joined the Distribution Committee at the invitation of George F. Karch, a member of the executive committee of the Cleveland Trust Company, whose president was chairman of The Cleveland Foundation's Trustees Committee and thus an appointing authority. Karch, as Sherwin recalled it, had pulled him aside at a board meeting of the Clevewon Corporation, of which they were both directors.

"I just found out that we have to appoint a member of the Distribution Committee of The Cleveland Foundation," Karch had said. "Will you take the job?" At first Sherwin had declined, saying, "No, I have enough to do." But Karch had persisted, claiming, "It doesn't take any time at all, what with a couple meetings a year."

Sherwin had acquiesced only to find out that the job wasn't as negligible as it had been painted. In fact, so seriously had he taken the responsibility of helping to decide how The Cleveland Foundation's millions would be dispensed that, like Clark and Smith before him, he had become troubled by the unimaginative nature of most of the grantmaking. As he would later bluntly put it: "... I got tired of [receiving] applications to buy a new station wagon for some institution. I didn't
think that was our purpose. ... I always felt that the Foundation was not there to be another community fund and just support ongoing budgets of existing things. I felt it was our job to start things ... to look into matters of civic interest. ..."

In 1964, the year The Cleveland Foundation turned 50, Sherwin had taken the first step toward addressing his concerns: He had written a memo to the files documenting his opinion that grant requests were not being adequately evaluated before being presented to the Distribution Committee for approval. The document had expressed Sherwin's growing belief that The Cleveland Foundation's staff needed to be upgraded and expanded. Given his private assessment of the needs of the older organization, that Sherwin had ultimately decided to accept Dolph Norton's proposal to join forces with the flourishing younger foundation would come as no surprise. From the vantage point of his place on BICCA's housing subcommittee, Sherwin had been favorably impressed with what he had seen of the Associated Foundation's work. At the invitation of Kent Smith, he had also been given the opportunity in late 1965 to sit in on a meeting of its board.

But other close observers had been surprised when, on July 6, 1967, John Sherwin and Kent Smith publicly announced the alliance of the two foundations they respectively chaired, a move taken to "help make both foundations even more responsive to community needs by combining the great resources of The Cleveland Foundation with the innovative approaches developed by the Associated Foundation."

Among the astonished bystanders was Robert D. Gries, whose paternal grandfather had been an original trustee of the Beaumont Foundation, one of the cosponsors of the Associated Foundation. Gries would later conclude that the affiliation would never have taken place had it not been for the unhappy events of a year before, when an angry crowd gathered on the evening of July 18, 1966, outside a tavern at Hough Avenue and East 79th Street after its white owner refused to give a black customer a glass of water. Incensed, the crowd began smashing the bar's windows. The incident had sparked four days of looting, vandalism and arson during which four persons died and property damages mounted into the millions. The violent outpouring of anger and frustration had come to be known around the world as "the Hough riots." In Gries's view, prior to the riots the Cleveland establishment in the main had regarded the work of the Associated Foundation as liberal do-gooding.
"The business community sort of viewed the Associated Foundation as okay as long as it was kept over there for those who needed it," Gries said. "But the riots scared the hell out of everybody. They wanted to know how do you buy peace? All of a sudden Dolph looks like he has the answers. People start looking at him in a different light."

Although Norton had broached the idea of joining forces in early 1965, negotiations between the two foundations had not, in fact, begun in earnest until shortly after the Hough riots. Instead, Sherwin had first sought to reinvigorate The Cleveland Foundation by luring Keith Glennan away from the presidency of the Case Institute of Technology to become the Foundation's director. After Glennan had declined the job offer, Sherwin had begun thinking more seriously about Norton's suggested alliance. On August 23, 1966, Seth Taft, who was now the Associated Foundation's attorney, finished drafting an expanded version of the proposal that Norton had first submitted to John Sherwin some 17 months before. Taft's version had been passed along to Cleveland Foundation attorneys at Thompson, Hine and Flory, who by December 12th had produced a draft of a legal resolution that provided for the merging of the two foundations' boards. This document was reworked by Taft and resubmitted for consideration by Sherwin, Smith and Norton at a meeting held on December 30. Whatever complex motivations each brought to the table, an agreement in principle to merge operations was reached at that time. Norton's later assessment of the December meeting was that "the Associated Foundation ... persuaded The Cleveland Foundation that its structure was outdated."

Since Smith was a member of the Distribution Committee, its remaining three members were the only persons left to persuade. In early January, Norton had met separately with these individuals, but it was no doubt Sherwin's influence that proved decisive in winning their consent. "Sherwin was an outstanding leader," the Foundation's counsel, Malvin (Mal) E. Bank, would later say of Sherwin's management style. "He knew that leadership means getting things done, not leaving things to chance. In preparation for an important meeting, he would sound people out beforehand; then at the meeting he would let everyone have his say. Then at the end he would say, 'Well, I think this is what we've decided.' He was very smooth. He always got his way."

On April 14, 1967, the Distribution Committee and the Trustees Committee had voted to amend the 1930 Resolution and Declaration of
Trust Creating The Cleveland Foundation under the Multiple Trusteeship Plan. The amended resolution allowed for the temporary expansion of the Distribution Committee from five to fourteen members; on April 1, 1971, the committee would be reduced to eleven members. At the same time it was agreed that the nine members of the board of the Associated Foundation not previously members of the Distribution Committee would be appointed to the latter. A similar resolution passed by the Associated Foundation board saw the three members of the Distribution Committee not then trustees of the Associated Foundation appointed to the latter's board.

In actuality, what had been created was an identical board for two separate legal entities. Board members would thereafter meet on a quarterly basis to approve recommended disbursements from each foundation's separate pool of funds. Each foundation would maintain its original name to identify, among other things, the source of funding for subsequent grants, but staff and headquarters would be consolidated. The Associated Foundation staff had already moved in December 1966 into quarters with The Cleveland Foundation at 700 National City Bank Building. Although he knew he would soon be named director of The Cleveland Foundation, Norton (who would retain the title of president of the Associated Foundation) had taken pains to ensure that Kim Johnson was installed in the largest office, which Johnson occupied until his official retirement on December 31, 1967.

In addition to Barbara Rawson, who was promoted to assistant director, the Associated Foundation staff consisted at the time of three talented young associates: former attorney Bruce L. Newman, who served as staff to the PATH Committee; former Welfare Federation planner Seymour Slavin, who coordinated summer programming for the city's youth; and former PACE staffer Roland Johnson, the Associated Foundation's first black professional employee, who specialized in primary and secondary education. As was its practice before the alliance, the program team would continue to meet with Norton every Monday morning to receive individual assignments to new grant proposals and discuss progress in evaluating previous requests. But now the staff was recommending the allocation, not of a mere $250,000, but of almost $5 million annually to five newly created subcommittees of the Distribution Committee (youth, education, cultural affairs, public affairs and health and welfare), which would further examine the grant proposals before
they were sent on to the full board for approval. (The expanded Distribution Committee met to make grant authorizations for the first time in July 1967.)

Now they were truly a community foundation—a change in status that would inspire Dolph Norton and his staff to try to be even more responsive to the needs of the city. Bruce Newman would observe this sea change with great interest. A native of Shaker Heights, Ohio, he had given up the lucrative practice of law at age 29 to accept a one-year internship with the Associated Foundation in 1965 based on his perception that philanthropy was where the action was in Cleveland. Newman would go on to become director of the Chicago Community Trust—a career path that was greatly influenced, he later explained, by Norton’s transformation of the role of the community foundation. Newman recalled:

Community foundations prior to Dolph’s time were hidden. Literally. For its first 50-odd years the Chicago Community Trust consisted of two guys—the director and his part-time secretary—sitting in a dingy back office somewhere. They didn’t want people to know they were there, ‘cause they might come in and ask for money. What they did was relate to donors. It was a very closed world. And Dolph opened it up. One of his real tactics was to be out in the community talking to people. Dolph was everywhere. It got to the point that whenever anyone had a problem, they called Dolph.

A steady flow of newly hatched community groups, their members clad in bell-bottoms and dashikis, began to appear at the Foundations’ door.” Barbara Rawson especially made it her business to ensure that “no good idea or person escaped.” If the hopefuls lacked the skills to put together a grant proposal, Rawson would help them draft it. “Okay, let’s assume you get the money. Now what are you going to do Monday morning?” she would prompt them. The question became celebrated around the office for its directness and simplicity. If meritorious, their answers would ultimately be presented to the combined boards of the Foundations (which is what the two philanthropies will be called hereafter when referred to in the aggregate).

Presiding over what became quarterly meetings of the expanded Distribution Committee, which at Norton’s quiet insistence were held in the Foundations’ offices rather than at the exclusive Union Club, was John Sherwin, who had retained for himself the position of chairman of
The Cleveland Foundation. Within a year of the alliance he was named chairman of the Associated Foundation as well, with Kent Smith becoming chairman emeritus. (Because of restrictions in The Cleveland Foundation's charter limiting service after the attainment of age 75, Smith would retire from both boards in 1969.)

In time Sherwin would come to view the alliance as a nonevent. It had simply been the natural thing to do, he would explain, leaving to others the observation that from this propitious marriage had been born the community foundation as a modern organization, with its professional staffing, subcommittee structure and active involvement in the "urban problem."