

Grant from Education Foundation helps expand STEM program at John Harris Elementary School

Stefanie Hage, a third-grade teacher at John Harris Elementary School, is always looking for ways to engage students and help them learn in new and exciting fashion.

She especially enjoys making use of the school's expanded STEM Lab, the first one in the district.

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which typically are challenging subjects for students. However, STEM-related classes also have significant applications in the real world.

Hage has been a strong force in establishing and expanding use of the STEM Lab program at John Harris, Principal Nancy Hagen says.

"She's just an innovative and passionate teacher who is driven. She's gone above and beyond to create this (lab) for our students," Hagen says.

The lab was established with funding from a grant through the Sioux Falls School District. An Innovation in Education grant from the Education Foundation helped expand the program and make it available to more students.



Third-grade teacher Stefanie Hage (left) and Principal Nancy Hagen check out instructional equipment in the STEM Lab at John Harris Elementary School.

The grant for approximately \$4,000 was awarded for an application submitted by kindergarten instructor Shannon Hohweiler for robotics and coding resources.

The grant to Hohweiler was a big boost that has enabled the school to open the lab to every student in the building," Hage says.

The lab enables teachers to present challenges for students at all grade levels and increase the complexity of projects as students advance.

Students have access to robotic resources such as Bee Bots and Spheros to learn about coding, Vex Robotics kits and Lego Mindstorms for design and building projects, and Cubelets robotic blocks for construction.

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Educator leaves gifts that will have lasting impact



Karen Saxvik

The late Karen Saxvik understood the value of education and enjoyed helping students learn.

She pioneered a program in English as a Second Language during the early 1980s in Minneapolis. She also taught first grade at Robert Frost Elementary in Sioux Falls for many years and played an integral role in the Reading Recovery program.

“She loved teaching, and she worked really hard,” recalls Beth Boyens, one of Ms. Saxvik’s two daughters. “She was usually there early, before the custodians, preparing for the day.”

Ms. Saxvik passed away Dec. 21, 2015. In lieu of flowers, the family asked that memorials be directed to the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation and to the First Lutheran Church Music Ministry.

With help from the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, Ms. Saxvik also left proceeds from an insurance policy to the Education Foundation.

“It meant a lot to my sister (Sarah) and me that mom decided to direct her legacy to something she cared about and was passionate about,” says Boyens, who teaches English at Augustana University.

The Education Foundation uses money from legacy gifts and other donations to fund grants to teachers for innovative teaching projects. The organization also helps first-time teachers with \$100 grants to buy classroom supplies.

The Education Foundation partners with the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation to accept donations and manage its endowment.

“We’re always glad to be a facilitator to accomplish the donor’s wishes,” says Regina Q. Jahr, vice president for development at the SFACF.

Many of the people who contribute to the Education Foundation are employees, volunteers or former students of Sioux Falls Public Schools. Other donors include local businesses and individuals who value education.

Contributions don’t have to be large to add up and have a positive impact, Jahr says. Donors can contribute to the Education Foundation in a number of ways, including payroll deductions, memorial gifts and bequests in a will. Contributing through means such as an insurance policy also is a great way for donors to get assets where they want, Jahr says.

When someone leaves a gift for the endowment fund, the family can take comfort in knowing the money will go to a good cause year after year, she says.

Tips for giving

The Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation helps donors give back to the community and to causes that matter to them.

The SFACF is the steward of an Education Foundation Fund to which donors may contribute.

Gifts of cash, appreciated stock, other securities and real estate are the most common ways for people to give to such funds. Gifts can be granted through a will or estate or by designating a beneficiary in an insurance policy or retirement plan.

For more information about gifting options and the SFACF, see www.sfacf.org. The SFACF also can be reached by calling (605) 336-7055. Its offices are at 200 N. Cherapa Place in Sioux Falls.





These photos, provided by teacher Stefanie Hage, show students engaged in projects in the STEM Lab at John Harris Elementary. The lab serves all of the approximately 650 students at the K-5 school in southeastern Sioux Falls.

STEM Lab helps engage elementary students

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"The STEM Lab engages students in investigative, innovative and creative thinking," Hagen says.

The use of robotics tools allows for the engagement of students in creative and meaningful ways while also meeting academic standards. Some projects create nonstandard opportunities, meaning students might not get the results they expected, which is fine, Hage says, because that's the kind of study that can create real growth in students.

The STEM Lab opened in a small room in January 2015, but since then has moved to a larger classroom. The lab serves all of the school's approximately 650 students.

Individual teachers are responsible for incorporating STEM Lab opportunities into their classroom lessons. During the school year, students are using the lab every day. But teachers also can load up Stem Lab supplies for presentations or use at other schools in the district.

Visiting a maker space in the Harrisburg School District initially fanned Hage's interest to help develop a good Stem Lab in Sioux Falls.

"Providing STEM education for students is something I knew I wanted to be involved with. Creating learning opportunities for children is what education is all about for me," she says.



Retired principal and teacher Nancy Duncan enjoys giving back to her former profession

Nancy Duncan knows education, especially Sioux Falls Public Schools. She has spent 42 years – and counting – in teaching and administrative positions or in volunteer roles.

Before she retired from the Sioux Falls School District in the 2014 school year, she had taught or served in an administrative role in 11 schools in the community.

She also taught for several years in Minnesota during the middle of her career, and she currently teaches a graduate-level course about critical issues in education at the University of Sioux Falls.

Duncan also stays close to education by serving as a volunteer member of the Education Foundation Board.

“It’s a fun way to give back to your profession without working full time,” she says.

She also has given back to her profession by inspiring her students.

Among Duncan’s former students is Kiki Nelsen, a mathematics teacher and National Honor Society adviser at Roosevelt High School. Nelsen also serves on the Education Foundation Board.

Nelsen studied under Duncan in a program for gifted students at John Harris Elementary. She credits Duncan as a teacher who helped make her inquisitive and instilled in her a love of learning.

“I remember going to her room was like going to a really good storybook. Everything was so different and so fun,” Nelsen says.

Duncan continues to help inspire creativity and innovation in classrooms by chairing an evaluation panel that recommends Innovation in Education Grant awards to the Education Foundation Board. She is the only Board representative on the five-member panel.

“This is something I really believe in. I think it’s important to support great teachers,” she says.

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Former principal Nancy Duncan has been serving on the Education Foundation Board since late 2014.

Board members

The Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation is governed by Board of volunteers. In addition to Nancy Duncan, members are:

Peggy Baney, Vernon Brown (vice chair), Catherine Dekkenga (secretary), Jackie Dumansky, Stephanie Gongopoulos (chair), Nancy Hagen, John Hedrick, Teresa Jackson, DeeAnn Konrad, Deb Koski, Kiki Nelsen, Justin Reilly (treasurer) and Carly Reiter.

The Board is assisted by two part-time employees: Foundation Coordinator Angie Kuiper and Newsletter Editor Rob Swenson.



Duncan recruited by former member to serve on Board

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During the 2015-2016 school year, the Board awarded 18 grants for a record high total of \$47,815. To select the winners, the evaluation panel reviewed grant requests that totaled \$132,306.

Stephanie Gongopoulos, who chairs the Education Foundation Board, and other Board members, hope they will be able to raise more money in the future so that even more grants can be funded.

Finding ways to keep children engaged in learning is a constant challenge, especially with them increasingly plugged into so many electronic distractions, Duncan says.

The greatest challenge in providing good education is simply to make sure that children are safe and secure, physically and emotionally, so that they can learn without distraction, she says.

Duncan was recruited to serve on the Education Foundation Board by Doug Erickson, a former Board member and retired educator. Erickson says Duncan was the first person he approached to succeed him when his term on the Board was expiring.

"I knew she'd do a good job," Erickson says. "She was the first one I thought of. She didn't hesitate a bit."

Duncan recalls being a little hesitant in taking on the Board duty as she retired from being a full-time educator. But she has embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm. Semi-retirement has given the Minnesota native time to give back to her family as well as her profession.

Her husband, Barry, who she met in Sioux Falls, retired after a career in management for various business. They have two grown daughters. The oldest one, Sara, is a teacher in Colorado. The younger one is a cardiac ultrasound technician in Wisconsin.

Board mission is to enhance opportunity

The Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District.

The mission of the Education Foundation is to enhance educational opportunities and promote achievement among all students by supporting academic projects and activities not funded by tax dollars. It is our belief that the good life we share here is a reflection of the quality education our students receive in our local public schools.

Education news tidbits

The Education Foundation's second annual **Innovation in Education Breakfast** will be held Aug. 18 at The Country Club of Sioux Falls.

Dr. Brian Maher, who is beginning his second year as superintendent, will be the featured speaker. He is expected to talk about the coming school year and the state of the district. Classes for 2016-2017 will begin Sept. 6.

Breakfast attendees also will see demonstrations of how teachers are using money from Innovative in Education grants awarded by the Education Foundation.

The breakfast will begin at 7:30 a.m. and last an hour. Anyone interested in the work of the Education Foundation is welcome to attend. RSVP by Aug. 10 by calling 605-310-4198 or by emailing admin@SFEducationFoundation.org.

The First National Bank in Sioux Falls, First PREMIER Bank/Bankcard and SDN Communications are sponsoring this year's breakfast.

The first **Sioux Falls Area Teacher Swap Meet** will be held from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Aug. 11 at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.

The event, which is open to the public customers, is designed to help teachers buy, sell and trade school supplies. The Education Foundation is hosting the event. Avera Health is the sponsor.

