

## New books motivate students, says grant winner

Allie DeJong, a special education teacher at Lowell Elementary School, wanted books that would get her students more engaged in reading, and she found some.

As a bonus, she also got parents more engaged in their children's education.

DeJong found help in a series of Reader's Theater books. She bought the publications with an Innovation in Education grant for about \$3,800 that she received from the Education Foundation.

She purchased the books last year while she was teaching at Laura Wilder Elementary. When she moved this school year to Lowell, Laura Wilder wanted to keep the books. So the district bought her a set of the books to use at Lowell.

Some of the books are geared for students in kindergarten and others for students in the second through about the sixth grade.

The books are written in skit form. So, students can be assigned to read the part of specific characters in groups.

They practice in groups and, a few times a year, their parents are invited to school to watch a presentation.



**First-graders at Lowell Elementary School read from a Reader's Theater book for teacher Allie DeJong.**

Students' parents and relatives have loved the readings, DeJong said. They took photographs and enjoyed cupcakes in a festive environment.

The books for younger students feature nursery rhymes and songs, such as "This Little Pig." The books for older students focus on word play and grammar. In the book, "You're in the Punctuation Army Now," for example, the characters are punctuation marks. Here's an example of an exchange between characters:

Sarge: "And who are you?"

Exclamation Point: (loudly) "Exclamation Point, first-class, sir! I'm trained to add emphasis to statements, sir!"

Sarge: "An exclamation point, you say?"

Exclamation Point: (very loudly) "Front and center, sir! Yes, sir!"

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# Independent Insurance Agents give \$10,000 to help education

The Independent Insurance Agents of Sioux Falls has demonstrated support for improving learning opportunities for local students by contributing \$10,000 to the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation.

"We were excited to do it. It was a true fit for our group," said Steve Tripp, president of the Independent Insurance Agents.

The insurance group had researched the Education Foundation, met with its leaders and was impressed by its findings, he said.

"We want to give back to the community, and we want to be able to help organizations that promote the safety and growth of children," Tripp said. "The current membership feels this is a great fit and will be a great partnership for many years to come."

The Education Foundation is thrilled with the generous donation and will put the money to good use, said Stephanie Gongopoulos, chair of the Board.

"The donation will be directed to our Innovation in Education Grant Program. Last year, we were only able to fund 36 percent of the grant requests we received. This donation will enable us to grow the program," she said.

The Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization that provides academic grants for innovative teaching programs that would otherwise go unfunded.



For more information about the Education Foundation, see [www.sfeducationfoundation.org](http://www.sfeducationfoundation.org).

The Independent Insurance Agents of Sioux Falls, or IIASF, is an association comprised of local insurance agencies that share a common belief in the importance of active community involvement.

Members of the IIASF are: Boen & Associates, Fischer Rounds & Associates, Holmes Murphy & Associates, Howalt McDowell Insurance, Kouri Insurance, McKinneyOlson Insurance, Nielsen Insurance Services, North Central Insurance, Pillar Insurance, The Insurance Connection and Williams Insurance.

## Additional funding partners are welcome

Tax-deductible gifts from businesses and individuals are welcome.

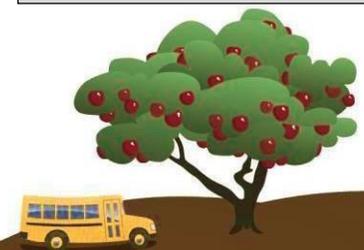
The Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District. The organization operates on donations

More information about the Education Foundation is available on our website, [www.sfeducationfoundation.org](http://www.sfeducationfoundation.org). Questions about Education Foundation programs may be directed to [SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com](mailto:SFEducationFoundation@gmail.com).

Questions about donation options may be directed to the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, phone (605) 336-7055.

## Our Mission

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.



# Koski brings fundraising expertise to Foundation

It's amazing what teachers can do with a few hundred dollars, Deb Koski says.

"Teachers are known for taking a small amount of resources and turning it into something remarkable," she says. "We've seen that many times over in the Education Foundation with our Innovation grants."

In addition to being a member of the Education Foundation's Board, Koski is a fundraising expert. She has worked professionally in fundraising for 17 years. She currently is the senior executive director of operations for the Sanford Health Foundation.

She is also a mother. She and her husband, Sheldon, have two school-aged sons. So she has a significant stake in the quality of education available in Sioux Falls Public Schools and in the mission of the Education Foundation.

The Education Foundation's primary role is to raise money for grants that are awarded to teachers for innovative classroom projects not funded by tax dollars. Grants typically range from a few hundred to a several thousand dollars. The Foundation also gives new, first-time teachers \$100 each to help them buy classroom supplies.

During the last school year, the Education Foundation Board awarded 18 grants totaling a record high of \$47,815. The organization wants to raise more money in the future to help improve learning opportunities for students. Koski has the knowledge and experience to help in the quest.

Americans, in general, and South Dakotans, in particular, are generous by nature, she says. And wealth is not necessarily the most important factor in someone's willingness to contribute.

"It's not always about the capacity of a person to give," Koski says. "It's about interest in making a tangible difference. How connected is someone to the mission?"

For many people in Sioux Falls, few causes are more important than making sure that children have good opportunities to learn. A lot of those people might not be aware of what the Education Foundation does or the options they have to help, Koski says.

"We have the opportunity here to raise a lot of money, but we have to do our homework," she says.

The Education Foundation's volunteer Board is trying to build awareness of the organization's valuable role in the community and figure out ways to connect more potential supporters. Board members expect Koski's expertise to be a big help.



**Deb Koski is the senior executive director of operations for the Sanford Health Foundation.**

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# Callie Beisch joins Board; officers elected for 2017

The Education Foundation Board has added a new member: Callie Beisch. She is a manager and CPA in the tax department at Eide Bailly LLP. She has worked at Eide Bailly about nine years

Her husband, Tyler, is a teacher. Her parents also were teachers in the Sioux Falls School District. She attended public schools in Sioux Falls and graduated from Lincoln High. She earned undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of South Dakota. Beisch and her husband have two daughters, ages 5 and 1.

"I just want to raise awareness of the impact and all the good things that the the Board does for the public and for students," she says. "I want to help with fundraising." She succeeds Justin Reilly, who completed two terms on the board. Reilly also is employed by Eide Bailly.

Two other Board members resigned recently because of business commitments. They were Teresa Jackson of Jackson & Associates and John Hedrick of Forever New.

The Board also has elected officers for 2017. They are:



**Callie Beisch**



**Jackie Dumansky**

- Chair: Stephanie Gongopoulos of The First National Bank in Sioux Falls.
- Vice Chair: Vernon Brown of SDN Communications.
- Secretary: Catherine Dekkenga of Architecture Incorporated.
- Treasurer: Jackie Dumansky of First PREMIER Bank.

Gongopoulos, Brown and Dekkenga were re-elected to leadership positions. Dumansky is new to the leadership team. She succeeds Reilly as treasurer.

## Deb Koski brings expertise

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Koski has been a "wonderful addition" for the Education Foundation, Board, says Chair Stephanie Gongopoulos.

"She is truly appreciative of the education her children are receiving in the Sioux Falls Public Schools system, and she wants to give back. Since the primary purpose of our Board is to raise funds for our grant programs, Deb's fundraising experience is a real asset and we are thrilled that she has agreed to chair our Fund Development Committee."

Anyone who would like more information about the Education Foundation can check out its website, [www.sfeducationfoundation.org](http://www.sfeducationfoundation.org).

The Education Foundation works closely with the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, which can provide information about gifting options. For more information, see [www.sfacf.org](http://www.sfacf.org) or call (605) 336-7055.

## Board members

The Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation is governed by Board of volunteers. Members are:

Peggy Baney, Callie Beisch, Nancy Duncan, Vernon Brown (vice chair), Catherine Dekkenga (secretary), Jackie Dumansky (treasurer), Stephanie Gongopoulos (chair), Nancy Hagen, DeeAnn Konrad, Deb Koski, Kiki Nelsen and Carly Reiter.

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





Allie DeJong teaches special education at Lowell Elementary School.

## Board wants to expand grants for innovative teaching projects

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DeJong, who is working on her master's degree, is in her first year at Lowell and her third year of teaching, overall. She had had been looking for something to spark students' interest in reading and thinks she succeeded with the new books.

"I wanted to get them motivated, and Reader's Theater was something new, and it got parents in the door," she said. "I've found that when kids get a new book their reading stamina increases."

The grant she received enabled DeJong to acquire 378 books. Multiple copies of 24 titles are available to students and other teachers. She received the grant during 2015-2016 school year, but the 2016-2017 is the first full school year in which the reading program has been used.

DeJong said she appreciated the opportunity to apply for an Education Foundation grant and was grateful to the donors who funded it.

The Education Foundation Board awarded 18 grants for a record high total of nearly \$48,000 during the 2015-2016 school year. Board members would like to raise more donations and expand the program.

For more information about the Education Foundation and its programs, see [www.sfeducationfoundation.org](http://www.sfeducationfoundation.org).

## Second annual Teacher Swap Meet will be held June 15

The second annual Education Foundation Teacher Swap Meet will be held June 15. New features are being added to the 2017 event, which will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.

The swap meet is designed to help K-12 teachers from the Sioux Falls region buy, sell or trade personal teaching materials.

"It's going to be bigger and better than the first one, which was a big success" said Amy Scott-Stoltz, event coordinator.

The name of the swap meet has been updated to include the Education Foundation, which hosts the annual event. Avera again will sponsor this year's swap meet.

Any teacher from the Sioux Falls region is welcome to sell their supplies. Teachers may reserve a table by writing [TeacherSwapMeet@gmail.com](mailto:TeacherSwapMeet@gmail.com). The period for reserving tables will begin April 1 and run through May 15. Shopping will be open to the public.

New features this year will include a limited number of vendor sites for retailers. Prospective vendors may contact event organizers by email, beginning immediately for more information.

Also new this year will be wellness demonstrations by Avera that might have classroom applications.

