

Investing in schools helps community grow

Stephanie Gongopoulos has a deep, personal appreciation of the positive effect that grants for innovative teaching projects can have in classrooms.

In addition to being a member of the Education Foundation's Board of Directors, she is a parent with two children attending Sioux Falls Public Schools.

She is also the executive vice president of The First National Bank in Sioux Falls, which is one of the Education Foundation's most generous patrons. The bank gives \$6,000 a year to the Education Foundation.

"It's a great way for us to impact lots of kids throughout the community," Gongopoulos says. "I know one of my kids has been personally touched by the grant process. So have many of our employees' children."

In addition to The First National Bank in Sioux Falls, four other Sioux Falls businesses give at least \$5,000 per year to the Education Foundation for grants for teaching projects and to help first-year teachers buy classroom supplies. They are: First PREMIER Bank, SDN Communications, Scheels All Sports and Capital One.

Donations to the Education Foundation help fund grants to teachers for innovative teaching projects. This year, the organization is funding 42 grants with a total value of nearly \$40,000.



Stephanie Gongopoulos



Candy Hanson

Donations to the Foundation also help first-year teachers with grants that offset part of their cost of buying classroom supplies. This year, 84 new teachers received \$100 each from the Foundation for classroom materials.

The last quarter of the calendar year is a popular time for businesses to make their spending plans for the next year.

Gongopoulos and other board members encourage individuals and organizations to consider making contributions to the

Education Foundation.

The Education Foundation is a good option for civic-minded donors interested in promoting education, says Candy Hanson, president and CEO of the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation.

"If you love Sioux Falls and you want to keep it growing, you know that investing in our children's future has to be top priority for the community," Hanson says.

"There are a lot of businesses that understand the importance of getting 21st Century educational tools to our teachers and children," she says.

In addition to cash gifts, a number of contribution options are available to prospective, individual donors.

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Tracy Vik (right) receives her \$5,000 raffle check from Board members Stephanie Gongopoulos (left) and Amy Scott-Stoltz (middle).



Mark Johnston (right) receives his \$5,000 raffle check from Board members Stephanie Gongopoulos and Amy Scott-Stoltz at a ceremony on Sept. 26.

2 lucky winners collect \$5,000 checks for raffle

In addition to donations, the Education Foundation raises money for educational programs through an annual sale of raffle tickets. This year's raffle concluded at the President's Bowl football games on Sept. 13 at Howard Wood Field.

Ticket-buyers Mark Johnston and Tracy Vik were the lucky winners. They each won \$5,000.

The two winners received their checks Sept. 26 from Amy Scott-Stoltz, who chairs the Education Foundation Board, and Stephanie Gongopoulos, who chairs the Raffle Committee.

Vik, the principal of school district's Spanish Immersion program, says she buys tickets every year. Part of her winnings will be devoted to the charity Project Warm-Up, which she and her daughter started to create and distribute blankets to needy children in the area.

"I know we'll be buying lots of fleece," she says.

Johnston, a communications professional in Sioux Falls, had no immediate plans for spending his winnings.

He is fortunate not only for winning but for living in Sioux Falls, he says. "We're really blessed in Sioux Falls to have the education system that we do."

Investing in schools

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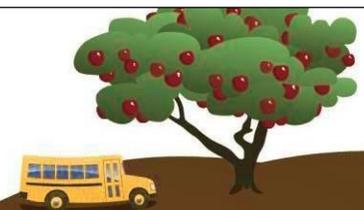
Annuities or trusts may be created, for example, and parts of estates may be left to the Education Foundation. Regardless of whether a company is making end-of-the-year spending plans or wants to follow through on a promise to give back to the community, the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation can help with the details.

Hanson and her staff at the SFACF can help donors leave a positive and difference-making legacy. Businesses and individuals that have questions about donation options may contact the SFACF at (605) 336-7055.

Our Mission

It is the mission of the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation 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.

Check online at www.sfeducationfoundation.org or on Facebook for the latest news from the Education Foundation.



Teachers have great ideas, Catherine Dekkenga says

Catherine Dekkenga loves the creative ideas that teachers in Sioux Falls Public Schools come up with every year.

Teachers file dozens of proposals annually for Innovation in Education Grants, which are funded by the Education Foundation. Teachers always come up with exciting, new ways to use technology, books and other educational tools to help students learn, she says.

“They are coming up with great ideas – ideas that we couldn’t even imagine” years ago, says Dekkenga, a member of the Education Foundation’s Board of Directors.

She is one of 17 members of the volunteer board. She serves on the finance and nominating committees. She has been on the board for about two years.



Catherine Dekkenga serves on the Education Foundation Board.

This school year, the foundation is awarding 42 grants to teachers for innovative classroom projects. The grants total a record high annual amount of \$39,858. The money will be used for educational projects not funded by tax dollars. The foundation also is giving 84 first-year teachers \$100 each to help them buy classroom supplies.

“I think it’s important for our teachers to have everything they need for their classrooms,” says Dekkenga, who works as an architectural intern at Architecture Incorporated in Sioux Falls.

She was recruited to serve on the Education Foundation board by former member Meredith Larson. He says Architecture Incorporated is a loyal contributor to the Education Foundation. The company gives \$1,000 a year to the organization. So the board was looking for member from the firm.

Dekkenga was a great fit for the open seat, Larson says. She’d grown up in Sioux Falls and had children attending local schools. “She was perfect, and she actually was pretty excited about it,” Larson says.

Dekkenga wasn’t familiar with the Education Foundation until she was approached about the possibility of serving on the board. She has embraced the role with her typically positive and cheerful attitude, says Elizabeth Squyer, principal architect at Architecture Incorporated. “We really support Catherine’s involvement in the foundation, and we’re very pleased that she’s involved in the community and on this board,” Squyer says. “She represents the firm very well.”

In addition to Dekkenga, members of the Education Foundation Board are: Vernon Brown, Diane Dietsch (Vice Chair), Doug Erickson, Twaine Fink, Stephanie Gongopoulos, David Heflin, Steve Herman, Teresa Jackson, DeeAnn Konrad, Mike Moore, Anne Powers, Cathy Regas (Secretary), Justin L. Reilly (Treasurer), Carly Reiter (Ex Officio), Amy Scott-Stoltz (Chair) and Jamie Simko. The Board is assisted by two part-time workers: Foundation Coordinator Angie Kuiper and Newsletter Editor Rob Swenson.



Eugene Field: ‘Cool place, and a good place to learn’

The bright, colorful interior hallways of Eugene Field A+ Elementary School reflect its role as the first and only school of its type in Sioux Falls and South Dakota. A+ is short for arts plus academics.

Daily instruction in the arts is fundamental to the teaching philosophy at Eugene Field A+, one of five specialized schools in the Sioux Falls School District.

“This is a cool place, and a good place to learn,” says Ann Marie Davis, the principal at Eugene Field A+.

Sioux Falls also has specialty schools that emphasize areas of study such as Spanish or mathematics, science and technology.

Eugene Field A+ at 501 S. Highland Ave. in east-central Sioux Falls was substantially expanded and improved during the past 18 months. Eleven new classrooms, including a dance studio, were added to the school as part of a nearly \$4.8 million construction project.

The work was substantially finished by the time that the 2014-2015 school year began in September.

Enrollment is 386 students, up from 285 three years ago. Seventy-five percent of the students open enrolled from other boundary areas in Sioux Falls or come from other communities. The other 25 percent are children from the neighborhood.

The school had been operating at its enrollment capacity, but now has room for additional students. “We’re still a relatively small school, even at 386,” Davis says.

In addition to integrating arts into the curriculum, focusing on the different learning styles of students differentiates Eugene Field A+, she says.

Faculty members at Eugene Field A+ recognize that people are smart in different ways, and they learn in different ways. Students at the school are allowed to learn creatively.

Instruction in arts is integrated into academic courses, and core academics are integrated into arts instruction.

During a recent tour of the school, one teacher was helping kindergarteners with spelling by having them lay on the floor and form letters in the word “cat.”



Ann Marie Davis is the principal at Eugene Field A+ Elementary School.

In addition to their regular classes, students take a weekly, 42-minute class in each of the following courses: art, music, drama, dance and physical education.

The school, which is for students in kindergarten through fifth grade, is named after the late American writer Eugene Field, who was best known for amusing essays and poetry for children, such as the poem “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.”

This is the 12th year that the arts have been an emphasis at Eugene Field A+ Elementary.

A survey of parents indicates that they send their children to the school for a variety of reasons, including the focus on arts, the creative learning environment, the quality of the staff and the size of the school.

Davis says families in Sioux Falls have wonderful educational choices for their children. “This is how, I believe, children learn well,” she says. “I have a great passion for this school.”

