

Education Foundation receives record contribution from Sammons Financial

Sammons Financial Group contributed \$17,500 to the Education Foundation on Oct. 19. It was the single, largest donation ever made to the nonprofit organization, said Amy Scott-Stoltz, who chairs the Education Foundation Board.

The money will help fund an organization program that awards competitively earned grants to teachers for innovative educational projects. The Education Foundation also helps first-time teachers buy classroom supplies.

Sammons Financial is a business in Sioux Falls that includes Midland Financial Life Insurance Company.

"We're elated that they recognize the good work the Education Foundation does helping teachers foster creativity and innovation," said Nancy Duncan, a Board member who serves as the liaison with the panel's Grants Committee.

Representatives of Sammons Financial presented a check to volunteers with the Education Foundation at the Instructional Planning Center. Superintendent Brian Maher also participated in the ceremony.



Pictured from left are: Catherine Dekkenga, Anne Powers, Amy Scott-Stoltz, Nancy Duncan and Carly Reiter of the Education Foundation Board; and Richard Hicks, Joellen Davidson and Marissa Briscoe of Sammons Financial.

Richard Hicks, associate vice president with Sammons, said the contribution was part of the company's Community Impact Challenge in which employees help determine how charitable donations should be spent. Joellen Davidson, a manager in the company's Life Service Department, and Marissa Briscoe, a customer contact specialist, also participated in the presentation.

"We hope you'll find a good use for the contribution," Hicks said. Board members assured him that the money was a good investment that would help improve the quality of local education.

To help stimulate more creativity in classrooms, the Education Foundation recently increased the award limit for its Innovation in Education Grants. The maximum that a teacher or group of teachers may seek for a project has been raised from \$1,500 to \$10,000.

This year's grant winners will be announced in late November or early December. About 50 applications are being considered.





Dr. Brian Maher speaks at breakfast.

District values education but also has challenges, Maher says

Dr. Brian Maher recognized soon after starting work as superintendent in Sioux Falls last July that the community valued education.

“That is clear,” Maher told guests at the Education Foundation’s second annual Innovation in Education Breakfast on Aug. 25 at the Minnehaha Country Club.

Maher and Dana Dykhouse, CEO of First PREMIER Bank, were the featured speakers at the breakfast, which attracted 110 donors and other people.

Students in Sioux Falls have above average college testing scores, Maher said, and the school system has established multiple pathways for students to succeed.

However, Maher also said that although Sioux Falls is doing well economically, the School District is deals with more poverty than he expected. More than 40 percent of the district’s students qualify for free or reduced lunches, he said, and the number of students getting financial help has increased about 13 percent in the past decade.

“It’s so easy to see all of the positives and look past some of these areas of need,” Maher said.

Dykhouse focused his remarks on the high quality of teachers and workers in Sioux Falls, which he considers the community’s greatest strength. “The human resources we have sets us apart from anywhere in the country,” he said. “We need to never lose that focus.”

Harriet Scott Senior Care Management and Consulting in Sioux Falls sponsored this year’s breakfast.

You can help schools by making donation

The Education Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District. Its objective is to assist teachers and help create opportunities for students.

You can make a difference by donating to the Education Foundation to support academic projects and activities not directly funded by tax dollars. Gifts to the Foundation fund programs that encourage innovative teaching. Grants also are awarded to help first-time teachers buy classroom supplies.

More information about making donations, as well as education news, is available on the Foundation’s website, www.sfeducationfoundation.org. Businesses and individuals with questions about donation options also may call the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation at 605-336-7055.

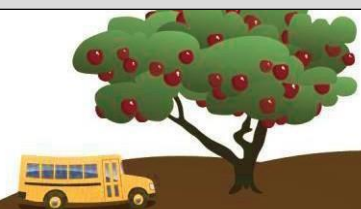
Our Mission

The mission of the Sioux Falls Public Schools 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.

Our Board

Volunteers who serve on the Education Foundation Board are: Peggy Baney, Vernon Brown (Secretary), Catherine Dekkenga, Nancy Duncan, Twaine Fink, Stephanie Gongopoulos, John Hedrick, Teresa Jackson, DeeAnn Konrad, Mike Moore, Anne Powers, Carly Reiter (Ex Officio), Diane Rausch (Vice Chair), Justin Reilly (Treasurer), Amy Scott-Stoltz (Chair) and Jamie Simko.

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



Teaching robotics with software from grant program helps students think and have fun

When students study robotics in Sharon Andrews' classes, they learn more than how to design or control a mechanical gadget. They learn to be precise and logical.

"Coding is like a foreign language. If you don't have proper punctuation or proper capitalization, it won't work. That teaches them to be careful," Andrews says. "Most importantly, it teaches them logical thinking."

Andrews is an Honors Science/Gifted Education teacher at Edison Middle School.

She also is among last year's recipients of an Innovation in Education Grant from the Education Foundation. She received about \$600 to buy Robotc Virtual Words software and a license that does not expire.

Students use the software to program computer-simulated images and makeshift robots to move and perform tasks. The children enjoy what the software enables them to do, and the technology allows Andrews to be more creative and efficient in her teaching.

"The kids experiment with it and teach other kids what to do. They figure it out," she says. "I'm learning with the kids, which is great."

Andrews has been teaching in the Sioux Falls School District for 16 years and has earned other grants in the past. But without the grant for robotic software she was awarded last school year, teaching computer language would be much more difficult, she says.

"I think it's phenomenal that Sioux Falls has this opportunity for teachers," she says. "It allows teachers to be more creative and innovative."

Since 2005, the Education Foundation has awarded 226 grants totaling nearly \$213,000. More than 23,500 students have benefitted from the grants. More grants will be awarded this year.



Grant-winning teacher Sharon Andrews advises students Abigail Zenner (left) and Ian Haak (right) in a sixth-grade science class at Edison Middle School.

Andrews was among the speakers Aug. 25 at the Education Foundation's second annual Innovation in Education breakfast. With help from two students, she demonstrated how the robotic software works.

"Before the Foundation started giving grants to Sioux Falls teachers, there weren't a lot of opportunities out there," Andrews told the breakfast audience.

She pursued for grants from other sources, without much success. She did win a prior grant from the Education Foundation to buy software to enhance vocabulary instruction.

Her software for robotic training is being used again this year. "This software is forever. I'm so glad to have it," she says.



Washington graduate pays back School District by serving on Foundation Board

Justin Reilly, a proud and grateful product of the public school system in Sioux Falls, continues to learn about the district's challenges, opportunities and successes.

For the past five years, Reilly has been paying back the school system by serving as a volunteer member of the Board of the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation, which raises money for educational programs not funded by taxpayers. He is the treasurer of the nonprofit organization.

He graduated in 1999 from Washington High School, where he starred in football and track. He is a member of the school's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Reilly went on from Washington High to study accounting and business management as well as play baseball at the University of Sioux Falls. For nearly 12 years, he has worked as a CPA at Eide Bailly, a prominent, regional accounting and business advisory company. Last May, he became a partner in the firm.

"It's great to have his accounting experience as our fundraising efforts have expanded," says Amy Scott-Stoltz, who chairs the Foundation Board.

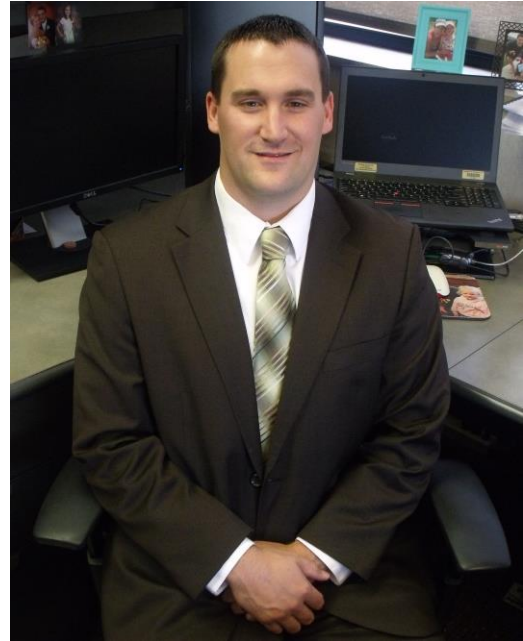
Reilly wasn't aware of the Education Foundation until he was recruited to serve on the Board. But he has found his time with the organization to be rewarding.

"I had a great experience going to Washington High School, and it was my way to give back to Sioux Falls and the district," he says.

Reilly and his wife, Katie, have three children, aged 6, 4 and nearly 2. So the family has a lot of school experiences remaining in its future.

Reilly would like to see the Education Foundation be able to spend more money on helping new teachers get established in their classrooms. The Board presently gives \$100 grants to first-time teachers to help them buy supplies.

"Giving more to new teachers is something I'd like to accomplish," he says.



Justin Reilly is a graduate of Washington High School. He works as CPA in Sioux Falls.

He also would like to see more money invested in students. "One thing I've really noticed is how many poor students we have in the district who need help," Reilly says.

Long term, he hopes the Education Foundation can raise enough money to provide college scholarships to graduates of public schools in Sioux Falls. The Board's present focus is on awarding grants to teachers for creative teaching projects. About \$40,000 a year is spent on Innovation in Education grants.

For the Foundation to grow and raise more money for programs, the organization will have to continue to expand its base of donors and collaborators, Reilly says. Sioux Falls and the School District are growing, which is presents challenges in maintaining a high level of educational quality, he says.



Education Foundation raffle produces 8 winners



\$1,000 raffle winners included Kristin Skogstad (far left) John "Jack" Gregg (middle) and Adam Scholes (far right). Education Foundation Board members Stephanie Gongopoulos and Amy Scott-Stoltz awarded the prize checks.

Eight lucky people won prizes ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 in the Education Foundation's 2015 Cash for Classrooms Raffle. The winners were:

- \$2,500: Chris Thorkelson, Lisa Maguire
- \$1,000: John "Jack" Gregg, Kristin Skogstad, Adam Scholes, Milt Jackson
- \$500: Jayne Zielenski, Koch Hazard Architects

Thorkelson, the chief operating officer at the Lloyd Companies, was one of the big winners. He gave his winnings back to the Education Foundation.

Lisa Maguire, a partner in the law firm Woods, Fuller, Shultz & Smith PC, was the other \$2,500 winner. She is contributing part of her winnings to charity and spending part on household bills. "I've always bought raffle tickets. The Education Foundation is such a good cause," she said.

Some of the other winners also used their winnings for educational causes. For example, Zielenski, principal at Laura B. Anderson Elementary, planned to raffle four \$50 gifts to teachers at her school to help them buy classroom supplies. The rest of the money will be used to buy T-shirts with the staff mission printed on the back, she said.

Krisin Skogstad, an administrator intern at Annie Sullivan, also planned to assist the staff at her school in some way. "I always buy a ticket each year because it's such a good program that helps get teachers what they need," she said.

The winners' names were randomly selected during the halftimes of two Presidents' Bowl football games played Sept. 12 at Howard Wood Field. Tickets sold for \$10 apiece or \$20 for three tickets. The Presidents' Bowl Raffle Committee assisted with ticket sales. The Education Foundation's share of the money will help fund grants for innovative teaching projects and help new teachers buy classroom supplies.



Education Foundation Chair Amy Scott-Stoltz, left, presents a check to raffle winner Jayne Zielenski. Stephanie Gongopoulos, right, chaired the Education Foundation Raffle Committee this year.

