

Education Foundation gets ball rolling

Written by Steve Ostermann
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One year after being established, nonprofit group has raised \$47,000, wants to expand its mission

A little more than one year after being established, the Grafton Education Foundation is not just getting by as a fledging group.

It's raising money and awareness and already expanding its mission.

Formed as a nonprofit corporation to benefit Grafton public schools through private donations and grants for educational programs, the foundation has raised \$47,000, GEF President Bob Hoffman told the School Board on Monday.

"Our goal is to take the Education Foundation to the next level," Hoffman said. "We want to get the community more involved. This is such a good cause."

Hoffman, a former School Board member, spearheaded the creation of the foundation in 2009 in response to growing concerns with budget constraints that have forced Grafton and other school districts to curtail spending on classroom programs. Rather than providing scholarships and supporting extracurricular activities, the foundation provides money for equipment such as SMART boards and WiFi, as well as outdoor technology, field trips, seminars and other educational activities.

Hoffman said the foundation plans to award \$12,000 in grants this year after reviewing applications from teachers, department heads and principals.

Organized in fall 2009, the foundation received nonprofit status as a 501 (c)(3) organization, which allows contributions it receives to be tax-deductible and its income and earnings to be tax-exempt.

Hoffman said the group has received several donations in the past year, including two anonymous \$2,500 gifts, \$5,000 from Port Washington State Bank and a pledge of \$25,000 from the Zaun Memorial Foundation to establish an endowment fund. The latter donation, received in December, will provide money on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis.

"We're very confident we can raise \$25,000, so next year we will be at \$50,000," Hoffman said.

In addition, the foundation's inaugural Seeds to Harvest fundraiser last October raised \$12,000, Hoffman said.

He said foundation members are encouraged about their first-year success and plan to step up their fundraising efforts this year.

"We want to get the business community involved," he said.

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School Board President Terry Ziegler said he was encouraged by the foundation's progress report.

"Congratulations on a great start," Ziegler told Hoffman.

The foundation currently has eight members on its board of directors, which can be expanded to as many as 15 people. The first eight — which provide a cross-section of local parents, current and former educators and other professionals — are Hoffman, Mike Donahue (treasurer), Richard Kranitz (secretary), Cristy Bauer, Sue Davis, Renee Riddle, Steve Vepraskas and Karen Walton.

Foundation members include Kristin Gasser, Julia McNally, Dave Scherzer and Sandra Uihlein. Serving as the group's school district staff liaison is April Shanks.

The foundation is encouraging district employees to apply for grants, which will be accepted through March 1. Application forms and additional information are available at www.graftoneducationfoundation.org.