

Grafton group caps first year by awarding \$12,000 in grants to six teaching projects

Kindergarten teachers Laura Jarvis and April Shanks were surprised last Friday when a smiling group of visitors arrived in their classrooms at Grafton Elementary School carrying balloons, a basket of apples and an oversized check.

The balloons and fruit were nice, but the \$819 check was the topper. It was one of six awards delivered by the Grafton Education Foundation to its inaugural grant winners.

Jarvis and Shanks, who will use their award to fund Tales 2Go MP3 Listening Centers in their classrooms for the next school year, were among nine grant applicants considered by the foundation.

“We had about \$12,000 available to use, and we were pretty excited to give out the first grants,” said Renee Riddle, a foundation board member.

“There was a good diversity of projects that will positively impact a variety of students throughout the district.”

Established in 2009, the foundation is a nonprofit corporation that helps offset funding gaps in educational programs at Grafton’s five public schools. Through corporate and private donations, endowments and fundraising activities, the foundation awards grants to individual teachers, teaching teams, department heads and principals.

Jarvis and Shanks will use their award to create listening centers equipped with an iPod and headphones for six students. The iPod will be loaded with a subscription to Tales 2Go, an on-line library that has more than 1,400 audio books.

Five other grant recipients received surprise visits Friday from the foundation’s prize patrol. Their awards and projects include:

- Shareen Mortag and Katie Herrick, Grafton Elementary School — \$1,800 to buy three iPads, cases and applications for special-education students. The iPads will have text-to-voice, zoom, closed-captioning and high-contrast display features.
- Christina Sheer and Diane Vepraskas, Grafton School District — \$1,145 to buy two iPads and applications for students at all grade levels who receive occupational therapy services. The iPads will give students with reduced motor and visual skills help with activities such as drawing and printing.
- Mike Kalina and Bob Geiger, Grafton High School — \$4,200 to build a low-ropes exercise course in the woods behind the school. The course will contain 15 stations with traversing cables, spider webs, climbing walls, trust falls, mental-challenge elements and team-building

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Written by Steve Ostermann
Wednesday, 01 June 2011 16:32

challenges.

In addition to being used by physical-education classes, the course will be open to community groups.

- Lori Mathias and Sandy Guiliani, John Long Middle School and Grafton High School — \$1,526 to create a Reality Store for eighth-grade business and career-education students. The classroom project will build financial literacy in eighth-graders, including financial budgeting and check balancing.
- Robin Morgan, John Long Middle School — \$2,568 to buy an interactive whiteboard that will help teach students complex engineering concepts and three-dimensional modeling.

Riddle said the foundation's board of directors review applications for educational value and practicality, weighing cost vs. benefits.

"We're hoping to get more applications and award more grants every year," she said.

The foundation has a 10-member board headed by President Bob Hoffman. In its first year, the organization received a \$25,000 pledge from the Zaun Memorial Foundation to establish an endowment fund; \$5,000 from Port Washington State Bank; and two \$2,500 gifts from anonymous donors.

To boost fundraising, the foundation will operate a concession stand at Lambeau Field in Green Bay for this season's Packers games. The group will receive 10% of the sale proceeds at the Grid Iron Grill and Going Deep Pizza stand in Section 326.

Riddle said 26 volunteers are needed for each of 10 games as well as any playoff contests and a Kenny Chesney concert June 11. Volunteers must be 18 or older, arrive 2-1/2 hours before each game and complete training.

"We're looking for about 200 people total, and right now we have about 60," she said. "We have people signed up for every game, but there are a lot more needed."

Last year, the Grid Iron Grill stand made \$21,000 for another nonprofit organization, Riddle said.

Volunteers do not have to live in the Grafton School District or have any connection with Grafton schools. They can choose the number of games at which they want to work.

Home games are scheduled to be played Aug. 19, Sept. 1 and 8, Oct. 2 and 16, Nov. 14 and 20, Dec. 11 and 25 and Jan. 1.

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Sue Meinecke at peacefulmom3@gmail.com.

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For more information, visit www.graftoneducationfoundation.org.