

Foundation grants \$23,500 to classrooms

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

The Sisters Schools Foundation awarded over \$23,500 in grants to teachers and projects at all three Sisters schools this spring.

Since its inception in 1996, the 10-member, all-volunteer Sisters School Foundation board works to have two distributions every year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The organization is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to raising funds to support and enhance programs that serve the Sisters School District. The Foundation is funded through events like Starry Nights and private donations.

"In the past we have had lean years where we have only been able to award grants once per year," said Vice-Chair Treasure Lewis. "This year, with 'An Evening With Karla Bonoff' as part of the Starry Nights series and the Foundation being the recipient of The Open Door's Dine with a Cause we were able to have funds to award two grant cycles."

The Foundation has funded enrichment activities that go well beyond what the regular school budget can support. This year, activities across all disciplines at all three schools have been funded — like sixth-grade outdoor school, the fourth-grade Oregon Field Trip where students got to travel part of the Oregon Trail and the Lewis and Clark

Expedition, and purchasing a kiln for the high school ceramic arts program.

During this current spring funding cycle both 2016 and 2017 Challenge Day activities were funded at Sisters High School, along with athletic trainer supplies and a new projector for the Sisters High School Lecture/Drama Room.

"The projector was a collaborative project for the high school," said Peyton Griffin, Sisters School Foundation board treasurer. "A portion of the funding came from the 2015 class gift, a portion from district building funds and the remainder from the Schools Foundation. This projector is not limited to its use in one specific room and will allow enhanced videos and presentations for the students and community throughout the school."

At the middle school, new art canvases, library support and training, document cameras, a flag display, kitchen improvements in one of the classrooms, and unique curriculum components were supported.

"Minecraft in the Classroom" for technology teacher Wes Estvold was funded as a unique cross-curricular program at Sisters Middle School. The program allows for students to use an educational version of the popular video game to enhance several classroom area skills.

Estvold wrote in his

proposal, "Minecraft allows students to build whatever they want. Scale models can be created when you need a practice unit about measurements and proportions. The building of scale models might integrate social studies content to allow for cross-curricular connections."

In addition, "One of the best ways to improve how students display their reading comprehension is asking them to create a visualization," he continued. "They could reconstruct various settings from the text and even recreate scenes and plot events ...they could also use these recreations to give a presentation or make predictions on what might happen next (in the story) and then physically create the predictions in Minecraft."

The elementary school grants included purchasing a "Big Book Easel," supporting Battle of the Books at the elementary level, purchasing new novel sets, implementing an innovative program called Handwriting Without Tears, and Science and STEM products for use in the classroom.

The science and STEM materials included eight different kits all designed with hands-on activities and demonstrations to provide students the opportunity to interact with science and access educational standards in a fun environment.

The Fairy Tale Problem Solving Kits were just one of

the sets purchased — where students engineer happier endings to classic fairy tales. Students get to build a house that can't be blown down from "The Three Little Pigs" or construct a bridge that keeps three goats safe from the troll in "Three Billy Goats Gruff."

The funds distributed as grants in this cycle ranged from \$200 to close to \$4,000.

Administration at each building is alerted twice a year when applications are available. Sisters Schools Foundation board members work closely with school administrators to determine highest priority funding areas and work to grant those areas of need first.

"This cycle we were able to fund all the applications that fit within our mission," Lewis said. "We would love for every teacher to submit an application."

The special events like Starry Nights and others help to support the general fund of the Foundation, which benefits all three schools. In

addition, private donors can make targeted donations to specific schools, subject areas, or programs by visiting www.SistersSchoolsFoundation.org.

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– Peyton Griffin

"We want to support innovation in the classroom," said Griffin. "Many of the activities and items we funded enhance the whole school experience – supporting things that will help students throughout their school career and their lives."

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