

SCHOLARSHIPS *from page 1A*

opportunities for economically challenged students.

The organization began years ago in New Jersey, where Dunes City Councilor and ASPIRE volunteer Robert Orr was working as a math teacher.

"Originally, we were going to support and reward kids anywhere we found them who were doing good things for the world. If a student started

something in the community, maybe a fundraising effort to create lunches for homeless people community, we were planning to help kids like that along with their projects with a cash award," he said.

Like most scholarship programs, it was merit based. The program was placed on the backburner due to the time it took to find students who fit the criteria. But when Orr began working at the ASPIRE program

at Siuslaw High School, which helps students apply for local, state and federal scholarships, Orr began seeing a discrepancy in what types of students qualified for the scholarships.

"What I've seen here is that kids have very difficult backgrounds," Orr said. "Difficult home lives, financial difficulties and personal issues."

According to Orr, beyond the typical national grants like Pell, there are at least 40 local schol-

arships that provide finances for college tuition. But the requirements for these can be difficult to complete. The applications can require multiple hours of community service, participation in after-school programs and grade point minimums. Hundreds of hours can be spent executing the requirements and filling out the multiple applications.

"Let's take a student who has a single parent who works or,

in some cases, doesn't work because of alcohol or drug issues," Orr said. "And maybe there are brothers and sisters in the family, perhaps even a baby. So, the student is taking care of the entire family by cooking meals and working full time."

Because of the cost of higher education, these students have to apply for multiple scholarships. According to tuition database College Data, the average yearly cost of going to the University of Oregon is \$27,502, including \$11,571 for tuition and \$12,450 for room and board. Typical scholarships generally give below \$1,000.

"There are a variety of scholarships, but if you look at the ones that are based on community service and grade point average, a student who has to take care of a family may not be able to get out into the community for service and focus enough on school work enough to get high grades," Orr said. "So their eligibility for scholarships is going to be far less. To take a student like that who is very serious and very hard working, and very anxious to move on and go to college, the scholarships may not be going to a student like that. They may be going to other kids who have more time or higher grades."

There can also be heavy competition.

Orr said that the majority of these programs only give out one scholarship at a time, though multiple students apply.

Then, what ends up happening is a disparity of who gets to go to college. Wealthier students who have more resources and a stable home life can apply for these scholarship programs, but more economically depressed students simply don't have the time to go through the prerequisite hoops. The wealthy get to afford college, while the poor do not. This creates a de facto class system where those with means have the chance for upward mobility to higher paying jobs, and those who don't often remain in the same situ-

ation as their parents.

Orr stressed that the Siuslaw community is enormously supportive and generous toward its student population, but sometimes youth are struggling to find ways to get a higher education, even with the community's generosity.

In addition, the population of students who are in these depressed economic situations in the region is larger than Orr had initially thought.

"What we see here in ASPIRE, where we work with juniors and seniors, is that some students are doing quite well. But what has surprised me is the number of students who do have difficult circumstances. I can't give you a percentage, but it considerably more common than I had imagined or anticipated," he said.

As for the reasons?

"I have thought and thought about that," Orr said. "I haven't been able to identify anything that I can specifically point to. I don't think it's unique to Florence. I have wondered if this is a situation that is much more prevalent across the country than most of us realize. In our lives, we only tend to see the surface of other people's lives. I think it's part of our culture in our time in history, and it troubles me greatly. In a much broader sense, what we see here speaks to much bigger issues in the country that are perhaps not being addressed."

To offset this problem, Students for a Better World focuses merit-based scholarships, instead focusing on individual situations.

"We are trying internally at the schools to identify students who would fit the category we are looking for," Orr said. "Many of the scholarships have application forms, but we're not asking them to fill out anything right now."

While in the future the program may look to require applications, the process will be minimal.

What the scholarship funds are used for also differs from most scholarship programs.

"The grants that are out there tend to focus more on tuition and fees. Also, there are so many students here that need financial help," Orr said.

The money given out to the program will be specifically earmarked for cost of living.

"Let's take one student who is eligible for a Pell Grant which is almost \$6,000 right now, and an Oregon Opportunity grant which is \$2,200. But room and board is going to be another \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year," Orr said. "They have to have a certain number of units to sustain their eligibility for the federal and state grants. So, it's not easy to just take a few classes because they might lose their eligibility for the big grants."

Another difference with Students for a Better World is that students may reapply for the grants throughout their college career.

"There are some ongoing scholarships, but not too many of them. So many scholarships are in place to help the students get started, but then they come to the second year. We want to make sure they have some support moving forward. What we don't want is for them to run into a financial well after their first year," Orr said.

As of now, the organization offers scholarships of \$500, though Orr hopes to be able to raise enough funds to lift the amount to \$1,000. The funds have primarily come from the pockets of board members.

And the number of scholarships that are available are limited. As of right now, the organization is handing out seven scholarships, but it hopes to raise enough funds to give out at least 15.

For more information on the program, or to donate funds, visit sites.google.com/view/studentsforabetterworld.

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