

Avon Education Foundation Awards First Round of Mini Grants

The newly formed Avon Education Foundation (AEF) has awarded its first series of mini grants to assist educators in the town's school system in pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning. The AEF was created this year to support Avon public schools and to promote an innovative and engaged learning environment through broad-based community participation and investment. The mission of the Foundation is to serve as a catalyst and investor for promising programs that will add more depth and breadth to the school curriculum – programs that would not otherwise be funded through the school budget.

Seven mini grants totaling \$6,860 were presented by the AEF Grant Patrol to teachers at Pine Grove School, Roaring Brook School, Avon Middle School and Avon High School on December 15, 2004. The seven winning proposals were selected from 18 applications submitted by Avon educators. Awarded grants were made across different disciplines and varying grade levels. Many of the mini grants are named in honor of donors who have made gifts of \$1,000 or more. However, some are being funded through unrestricted funds donated by generous individuals, businesses and community organizations during the AEF's first fundraising campaign. The Founder's Campaign will run through March 2005 and anyone who makes a donation before then will become a *Founding Donor* of the AEF.

The Richard and Jane Lublin mini grant was presented to Barbara Daly-Byrnes and Jodi Kryzanski, reading resource instructors at Pine Grove School. This grant will provide the ability to enhance and expand the highly effective Reading Success through Early Intervention program to children at the Kindergarten level. The Avon Junior Women's mini grant was awarded to Nancy Usich, a second grade teacher at Roaring Brook School, for a program designed to explore the history and culture of the Underground Railroad through music, art and literature. She plans to use the AEF grant to bring in a resident artist and musician.

The Roy and Shelley Silverman mini grant will support the creation of a television editing studio at Avon Middle School. Multimedia teacher, Patrick Mulligan, will use the funds to purchase new equipment that will help students learn to produce their own news programs, as well as music and children's videos. At Avon High School, a new method of instruction to improve critical thinking which incorporates an interactive SMART board will enable students to develop group writing assignments and hear voices in real time thanks to a donation from the Giles Family and an innovative proposal by teacher Julia Cowans-Wilhelm.

In 2005, Avon Middle School students will actually raise salmon in their classroom, for eventual release into local waterways, thanks to a grant underwritten by the Farmington Savings Bank. Teacher Christopher Jones developed the program as part of the eighth-grade ecology study unit to bring greater awareness to the fragility of our environment.

Kerry Lurate and the first-grade teachers at Roaring Brook School received an AEF mini grant to enrich the current phonics program with authentic children's literature. And at Roaring Brook School Winter Concert on December 16, music teacher Paul Johnson was awarded a grant to acquire various multicultural instruments for the development of units devoted to world music

The Foundation plans to make a second round of mini grants before the end of the school year (for programs that will be conducted in the 2005-6 school year). The deadline for applications is March 31, 2005. All teachers, administrators, and educators in the Avon school system and other town agencies are welcome to apply.

The AEF was formed this year by a group of local residents who are passionate about the quality of education in Avon. It was founded on the premise that in order to maintain the quality education already available in the Avon public schools, continued and expanded community support and investment is needed to sustain their future success. The Foundation will not replace items in the town budget, but rather will provide funds for initiatives that directly advance the curriculum and promote the highest levels of teaching and learning. Thus far, the AEF has raised over \$31,000 from individuals, companies and organizations that are committed to ensuring educational excellence in Avon. The ultimate goal of the new foundation is to be able to help create large, innovative educational projects that will elevate the level of educational

excellence in Avon for all students and residents. The AEF also hopes to begin raising funds for an endowment that will support education in Avon in perpetuity.

For more information about applying for a grant, volunteering, making a donation, or to share your ideas about how to enhance education in Avon, please contact Sue Bertolini, AEF Chair, at (860) 679-9236. Or you may write to Avon Education Foundation, P.O. Box 548, Avon, CT 06001 or visit the website: www.avonedfoundation.org.