

## **Avon Education Foundation Awards over \$10,000 To Library and Public Schools**

**By: Sara Ray**

The Avon Education Foundation (AEF) recently awarded more than \$10,000 in Mini-Grants to enhance educational programs in the Avon Public Schools and at the Avon Free Library. The AEF was created in 2004 to enrich Avon's strong commitment to learning. It has already invested \$17,000 in programs that directly upgrade the quality of the curriculum and support innovative teaching.

On June 6 and 8, 2005, the AEF Grant Patrol surprised educators at the Avon Free Public Library, Pine Grove, Roaring Brook, Thompson Brook, Avon Middle and Avon High Schools with checks totaling \$10,195 to fund 10 new and exciting learning opportunities.

The ten winning proposals were selected from 20 mini-grant applications submitted by Avon educators and will support exciting new projects to be conducted during the 2005-06 school year. The awards were made for programs in a variety of disciplines and across a broad spectrum of grade levels. Several of the Mini-Grants are named in honor of donors who have contributed \$1,000 or more to the Foundation. The AEF's Mini-Grant program is made possible through unrestricted funds donated by generous individuals, businesses and community organizations.

The Avon United Fund has generously underwritten two Mini-Grants this spring. The first was awarded to Carl Sauerbrunn, a music teacher at Thompson Brook School, to support a 'MIDI Lab' (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) that will allow every 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade student the opportunity to compose, notate and record original musical works on the computer. The technology will also enable teachers and students to discover new ways in which music can be integrated with social studies, language arts and science projects. Mr. Sauerbrunn and his students plan to form a new "Composer Club" where students can share ideas and collaborate on projects of their own outside the music classroom setting.

"China: Through the Eyes of a Child" is a dynamic new initiative that will be conducted by Roaring Brook School's second grade teachers Nancy Usich & Michele Lemis. This Mini-Grant, also named in honor of the generosity of the Avon United Fund, will help make the history and culture of Chinese Americans come alive to second graders through a multi-disciplinary approach. Students will explore Chinese legends, folktales, customs, food, music and origami, interact with guest speakers and Chinese dance performers, and participate in a school-wide Lion Dance parade. The resources purchased with the AEF grant funds will subsequently be available for use in other classes at both elementary schools.

The AEF- Avon Junior Women's Club Mini-Grant was presented to Avon Free Public Library's children librarians, Karen McNulty and Carol Randolph. This grant will enable the library to have a children's author visit our community during National Children's Book Week, beginning on November 13<sup>th</sup>. The author who is selected will have a broad appeal for children of all ages. "Helping us celebrate National Children's Book Week is a dream come true for us," said Karen McNulty. "This is the perfect week to have an author visit us. We were wondering how this was going to happen and what we would do if we did not have the funds. We are very grateful to the AEF and to the Avon Junior Women's Club for making this dream a reality for our community."

The AEF-Dos Santos Family Mini-Grant will fund a project for students at both the Avon Middle and Thompson Brook Schools conducted by educators Kelley Lanahan and Doreen Cohn. "Connecting to a World of Learning Using Streaming Digital Videos" will provide teachers and students at both schools with a new and powerful learning tool – real-time video through United Streaming. "Research shows that video content engages students, improves teacher performance and changes student-teacher interaction in ways that facilitate student achievement" said Kelley Lanahan, AMS computer/media technical assistant.

Jonathan Moss at Pine Grove School was awarded The AEF-Routt Family Mini-Grant towards the acquisition of a SMART board. The "SMART Board for Smart Teaching" is a project which will bring an

interactive white board into the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom. These computerized boards allow the teachers and students to interact with computers in exciting new ways. Mr. Moss comments, “They are wonderful and versatile teaching tools that give students the opportunity to tactilely interact with the material that they are learning. I am so excited to have the honor of being awarded this grant and am very grateful to the AEF and the Rount Family for making my dream possible.”

“KidWind” is another wonderful new project that will be conducted by Christopher Jones, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher at Avon Middle School. Funded by the AEF-Lounge Lizards Mini-Grant, this endeavor will enable students to experiment with the variables that impact wind turbine electrical generators and will look into the broader issue of renewable resource energy production in the world today. Mr. Jones comments, “The aim of the “KidWind” grant is to provide all the eighth grade students with the opportunity to explore current energy issues using a hands-on scientific methodology.” The Lounge Lizards is the Avon Middle School’s faculty band whose members generously donated to the AEF the proceeds they received from playing at Avon’s 175<sup>th</sup> Celebration.

The AEF-Shopis Family Mini-Grant was awarded to Roaring Brook’s computer/media technical assistant, Alexis Pariano. The grant will fund the purchase of software that enables students to develop a student-run newspaper. Students from the Avon High School have already been enlisted to participate in this effort by serving as advisors to the elementary students.

At Avon High School, science teacher Michael Marella’s innovative proposal, “A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words”, will integrate visual images into earth science activities using digital cameras in order to enhance learning of the content. “Students will be able to use the cameras to identify earth science processes at work in the environment around us, as well as collect and record data for laboratory activities” said Marella. “The expected result of the project should be increased student motivation, content comprehension, and depth of data analysis.” When these cameras are not in use by Mr. Marella’s students, they will be shared with other classes.

Peter O’Sullivan, a Latin teacher at the High School, received an AEF Mini-Grant to enrich language and world history classes. The purchase of dedicated technology will support VRoma. The VRoma project uses workshops and presentations to engage teachers and students in a virtual community dedicated to using internet technology to foster the teaching and learning of Latin and Roman culture.

Also at the High School, the FIRST Robotics Team was awarded an AEF Mini-Grant to purchase materials for the team to design and build reusable packaging to transport and store the team’s robot. With the dedicated support of parent volunteers, James Ligotti, Ken Kasner, Ross Loeb and Paul Santarsiero, this group of students has worked diligently and they are eligible to participate in Atlanta’s National Robotics Competition next year. Once at the competition, their newly designed packaging equipment will transform into a mobile computer work station. “For some students, the participation in FIRST Robotics allows for a life-changing and career-forming experience,” comments Jim Ligotti. “We are grateful that the AEF has the wisdom and pulse of the community and realizes that parents want to broaden the educational environment of their students.”

The AEF was formed last year to ensure and enhance excellence in Avon Public Schools and to pursue opportunities to bring educational programs to the community as a whole. The Foundation does not replace items in the town budget. It was formed precisely because community members have recognized that it is increasingly challenging to expand funding levels necessary to enhance excellence in our schools. The AEF believes it is time to reach for broader and deeper support of public education that will augment the funds currently available.

The entire budget of the AEF is raised privately – from interested and concerned parents with children in the schools, and from other members of the community including retirees, local businesses, and civic and service organizations committed to excellence in education. The AEF has already raised more than \$40,000 for its grant’s program and plans to create an endowment that will support educational endeavors in Avon in perpetuity.

For more information about contributing, volunteering, applying for a grant, 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](http://www.avonedfoundation.org).