

District 128 Foundation Awards Grants

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Pictured at the Nov. 24 awards presentation are District 128 Superintendent Prentiss Lea, Foundation for Learning Trustee Judy Sugarman, Monica Tolva, Vince DeLuca (accepting for Corey Atwell), Kelly Garrison, Liz Wietrzak, Amy O'Neill, Rebecca Austin, Sheila Russell, Sherri Rukes, Chairperson Anne Landgraf, Foundation Project Committee Member Kathy Peterson, and Trustee Scott Luce. Award-winners not pictured: Corey Atwell, Adam Lueken and Joshua Ravenscraft. Photo submitted by Mary Todoric, director of communications for Community High School District 128

The District 128 Foundation for Learning recently awarded \$10,860 in grants.

The eight grants were awarded to teachers whose proposed projects actively engage students and impact student learning. To date, the foundation has awarded more than \$30,000 in Innovation Grants to Libertyville and Vernon Hills High School teachers in their four years of existence.

"It is through the generous donations of both the school community and the community at large that we are able to distribute these funds," said Anne Landgraf, chair.

This year, the foundation received 12 applications and funded eight of the programs or projects. Funding is based on the proposal meeting several criteria including if it is innovative, its impact on students, how engaging it is for students and how it will enrich the curriculum, among others. The money has been awarded and must be used by the end of the 2011-12 school year, Landgraf said.

Among the projects awarded was Vernon Hills High School Library Media Specialist Monica Tolva's "Lending Library Media Center Books in New Technological Formats" project, which was awarded \$1,500. This project will provide students and staff the option to experience literature in new technological formats. Audio books will be available on five MP3 players and digital books will be available on five Barnes and Noble Nooks. With permission from a parent, students can check out these new formats. The funds will be used to purchase five Nooks, five MP3 players and start a collection of downloaded titles.

"I think reading good stories can happen in many different formats," Tolva said, adding she hopes the new technology will open doors to students who weren't interested in reading before. "I want the students to see our library as a fun place where they can try new things."

Building circuits

Another of the projects awarded funds was Vernon Hills High School Science Teacher Josh Ravenscraft's "Household Electricity" program, which was awarded \$1,125. Students will actively participate in building

circuits that are common in every household. These circuits will show the AP Physics C students that the theories they have learned regarding current, resistance, power, wiring circuits, magnetism and inductance over the past two years are applicable in the real world. Funds will be used to purchase all the supplies needed to build common electrical devices.

"I'm excited to see how the kids are going to react to it," Ravenscraft said, adding the project will give students an understanding of how a building is wired.

Another project funded is "A Greener/Healthier Future," submitted by Adam Lueken, a computer science and physical education teacher at Vernon Hills High School. Students in PE classes will use a bicycle hooked up to a power generator to create the necessary energy to power the fans, TV and possibly other devices inside the cardio room. Along with PE, biology and applied technology classes will have opportunities to use this device in their units on electrical energy and alternative energy. The \$1,500 award will be used to purchase all the equipment necessary to generate power from a stationary bicycle.

"I had to go through the Foundation as this is a really unique and innovative idea, which is what the grants are all about," Lueken said.

Lueken plans to add some competition to the program, setting the students against each other individually and as a class to determine which person and class produced the most energy.

Bridge Group, submitted by Vernon Hills High School's Rebecca Austin, Kelly Garrison, Amy O'Neill, Sheila Russell and Liz Wietrzak, was awarded \$1,400. Bridge Group students will participate in social and transitional activities to enable them to be better prepared for life after high school. The students will participate in activities like cooking, grocery shopping, eating at restaurants, using public transportation and other recreational/leisure activities.

"In the last few years, teachers at Vernon Hills High School have become aware of the growing number of students who could benefit from social skills training," Garrison said. The Bridge Group's goal is to work with this increasing number of students and help them learn how to apply the skills learned in the social thinking group in a community setting. Many of these students often unwittingly break social rules such as standing too close to people, making factual but rude comments and ignoring their personal hygiene. Although many of them would very much like to have friends, they have never learned how to initiate and maintain a friendship. Unfortunately, in adolescence they are very prone to psychiatric disorders such as depression and anxiety, which further hampers their socialization efforts." Other projects awarded funds include \$900 to "Safe Navigation: G.P.S. Units (Go Places Safely)." The program was proposed by Vernon Hills High School Teacher Corey Atwell. It will teach students how to use GPS units safely and utilize features that can help in case of emergencies. The GPS units will also enhance classroom projects related to trip planning and map reading skills.

"Fish Tails: Merging Chemistry and Biology by Looking at the Great Lakes," submitted by Libertyville High School's Sherri Rukes, was awarded \$1,435. This project will give students an opportunity to explore existing problems with the Great Lakes through programs with the Shedd Aquarium.

"Nanotechnology: Big Things from a Tiny World," submitted by Rukes, was awarded \$1,500. The project will have chemistry classes look into the concept and emergence of nanotechnology and how it impacts what they see in stores, medical field and elsewhere, through demonstrations, activities, laboratories and discussions.

"Solar Cells: The Forgotten Energy Source," submitted by Rukes, was awarded \$1,500. Chemistry students will be introduced to the concept of alternative energy and give them another source of energy to look at. Students will look at the design, functionality and efficiency of a solar cell and compare this source of energy to biofuel, gasoline, wind, etc.