

Tuesday, November 10, 2009

Foundation for learning

Quabbin aims to enrich classroom experience

RAISING MONEY TO SUPPLEMENT EDUCATION



Bob T. Jefferson Jr. of Brookfield teaches a life science class at Tantasqua Regional Junior High School in Sturbridge. M received a grant that paid for the comparison microscope the class uses. (T&G Staff Photos / TOM RETTIG)

By Bradford L. Miner TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

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The Quabbin Education Foundation will announce the first recipients of grants later this month, joining the ranks of other Central Massachusetts nonprofit organizations enriching the lives of students.

Modeled after successful foundations in Worcester, the Tantasqua district and Manchester, Vt., the Quabbin group will disburse more than \$7,500 raised at its inaugural fundraiser — the Tastefully Quabbin gourmet sampler in late September at Eagle Hill School Cultural Center in Hardwick.

Kerry Conaghan, president of the Quabbin Education Foundation, said the group went from being more than “just a good idea” in the spring of 2008 when a path to becoming a registered nonprofit was charted.

“In my role with United Way I come across a lot of grant opportunities, and I would share those with the school district. Unfortunately, they were ineligible for the majority because there was no 501(c)3 (re nonprofit organization) associated with the district,” Mrs. Conaghan said.

“That planted a seed, and Chris Nosel called from the district administration office and asked if I was interested in following through to see if there was interest in establishing a nonprofit education foundation,” she said.

From those early discussions a core group of about 14 pressed ahead with organizing the group.

“There was both a perceived need for providing the district with additional financial resources as well as a commitment to advancing educational opportunities for students throughout the district,” the group said.

“Once we got past the mechanics of incorporating, setting goals and writing bylaws, we focused on our first fundraiser, which by all measure was a great success, with more than 300 attending,” she said.

Education foundations differ, but for all the intent is to supplement, not supplant, programs supported by state dollars.

While the Worcester Educational Development Foundation helps with projects both in the classroom and on the playing field, Tantasqua limits the scope of its contribution to academic endeavors, according to Melinda, president of the Tantasqua Education Foundation, called Ted. for short.

Past grants from Ted. have helped buy books for a summer reading program, podcasting equipment, whiteboards, and a WeatherBug station at Tantasqua Regional High School.

The Shrewsbury Education Foundation, active since 1992, has awarded more than \$250,000 in grants throughout the region range from several hundred dollars to \$2,000 for each project or activity.

Stephen E. Mills, superintendent of the Acton-Boxboro Regional School District, was instrumental in the formation of the Worcester Educational Development Foundation right out of the gate in 2005.



Bob T. Jefferson Jr. of Brookfield teaches a life science lesson at Tantasqua Regional Junior High School in Stoughton. Jefferson has received a total of five grants. [Enlarge photo](#)

"It was a matter of realizing that the support that was once behind the Alliance for Education was still there and I was intent on harnessing it to help Worcester kids. We established ourselves as a nonprofit; our goal was to help and my belief in the level of community support was almost immediately confirmed," Mr. Mills said.

He cited his role in the launch of the Worcester nonprofit as one of the proudest moments of his career as an educator, working hand in hand with other city foundations and businesses such as Commerce Bank in the rehabilitation of Foley Stadium.

Mr. Mills said concerts at Mechanics Hall showcasing the city's talented student musicians not only provided a demonstration of talent, but further raised money to support the school department's music program.

"Foundations will always have a role as a partner in education, but as municipal budgets become more constrained and dollars have to be stretched, opportunities abound to give students chances for enrichment that would otherwise go by the board," he said.

Ms. Earls said that beyond the third annual Diamond and Champagne brunch held yesterday at the Old Sturbridge Village, the Ted. group is looking ahead to March 2010, when it would be telling its story at a national education foundation conference in San Antonio.