

Simi Valley Education Foundation distributes grants

Simi Valley programs will get \$55,000

By Jake Finch

Thursday, November 24, 2011

After six years, Cathy Carlson still doesn't get tired of giving away thousands of dollars at this time of year.

The chairwoman of the Enhancement Grant committee for the Simi Valley Education Foundation said the foundation could fund most of the grants requested, totaling more than \$55,000 this year.

"Every single application that came in was so good," Carlson said of the requests for money to benefit Simi Valley public schools.

Anyone working for a Simi Valley school can request an Enhancement Grant, which is used for programs, equipment and supplies not generally funded from a school's budget.

In October, each Simi Valley school received an Enhancement Grant, ranging from \$69.95 for an electronic Sketchpad in a math class to \$3,500 for an Arroyo Elementary School computer program designed to improve reading.

Grant requests this year seemed to lean more heavily toward science programs, especially at the high school level, said foundation Executive Director Cindy Jacoby. Of the 95 grants awarded, Simi Valley High School received eight, Santa Susana High School got five and Royal High School got three.

"At the high school level, the grants benefit the departments usually. At the elementary level, it's usually the grade level," Jacoby said. "And every grant is reusable from year to year. It's not consumable. That's what we love."

Carlson said her committee spends hours reviewing the applications. Besides funding projects and materials that can survive into future years — as opposed to one-time-only expenditures that won't benefit future students — the committee looks for proposals that will benefit the most students.

One grant that stood out to Jacoby and Carlson went to Arroyo Elementary School, the only elementary school in the district with two dedicated classes for children with

autism. Other schools have integrated classrooms with other special-education students, but Arroyo's 18 fourth- through sixth-graders with autism go to classrooms where instruction is tailored to their abilities, Principal Regina Reed said.

One aspect of the program, the Sensory Room, has toys, materials and activities to help the children focus through the use of their senses.

"The kids use it throughout the day," teacher Laura Sheinberg said. "We have schedule time, and then if they need to go to the room for self-regulation, it's open and available for their use."

Sheinberg said her grant will pay for equipment replacement.

"It sparks the room up and helps to keep their interest," she said. "And that's what we're always looking for: something to motivate them and help them to learn."

Last year's grants totaled about \$40,000, a sign of the struggling economy, Jacoby said. This year, fundraising efforts were stepped up and included additional events. The foundation also could give \$28,000 to Simi Valley schools around the start of the school year — a \$1,000 grant to each school.

Alcoa Fastening Systems, a Simi Valley company, donated \$18,000 last year and \$19,000 this year, Carlson said.

"If it wasn't for our community, we just couldn't exist," she said. "These people support us with the golf tournament, the gala, the concerts. We're just volunteers."



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