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Our Town

Education foundation hands out grants

By **ROB GLIDDEN**
STAFF WRITER

The Southington Education Foundation handed out 10 grants to local teachers during a reception held at Thalberg School last week.

The young foundation was formed last year, and the \$500 grants were the culmination of several months' worth of fundraising and building awareness.

Teachers were invited to submit ideas to the group. The proposals were meant to be innovative learning initiatives that otherwise would likely not have a place in difficult school budgets.

"The creativity and the time and effort put into these proposals just blows us away," said Tony Sheffy, president of the SEF's board of directors.

The 10 winning entries represented several of the Southington schools and offered a wide range of potential educational opportunities.

"Our biggest 'thank you' is to the grant recipients," said SEF board member Dr. George Costanzo. "You guys had some great ideas, and it's clear these teachers share the foundation's dream of instilling a love of learning."

Derynoski Elementary School teachers Deborah Francis, Patricia Salerno, Keith Tomlinson, Diane Hamel, Maryann Castrilli, and Erin Reilly proposed a "document camera," which will allow students to project their assignments onto

a big screen in order to facilitate chances to collaboratively evaluate and discuss their work.

Also at Derynoski, teachers Lindsay Barniak and Brenda Dominello were given a grant for their proposed "BFF" (Best Fluency Fix) program. This would give the students microphones designed for recording their reading aloud onto computers. Listening to themselves would help them and the teachers monitor their progress when it comes to reading fluency.

South End Elementary School teacher Ellen Bellinger proposed an activity based on the life cycle of a chicken. Students will observe eggs in an incubator and then learning how to care for the chicks in the classroom.

Fellow South End teacher Charity D'Andrea also received a grant for

her planned public speaking program, designed for students in grades two through five.

"I'm ecstatic," D'Andrea said. "This will be such a wonderful program. I've noticed that speaking and communication are often left out of the literacy curriculum for younger grades, but they are just as essential as reading and writing."

Thalberg Elementary School teacher Gina Krar suggested using iPods to allow students to listen to an audiobook while following along with a hard copy. Using iPods in the classroom also allows for other potential lessons which incorporate the technology.

Two grants went to teachers from Flanders Elementary School. The first was a joint effort by teachers Jean Graff, Jamie Scarfo, Merrick Voinier and Heather Alfano to host a "kindergarten literacy

night." This event will invite families to work together on activities designed to help develop the reading skills of their kindergartners.

The other is a science lab proposed by teacher Joyce McAloon. She plans for this lab to focus on life science and will even feature aquariums.

DePaolo Middle School teacher Joanne Grant proposed an extracurricular "movie club" to give students a chance to work on small-scale filmmaking projects.

Another grant for DePaolo will help create a "sculpture garden" in the school's courtyard, proposed by the school's Art Club, several unnamed teachers and PTO member Mary DeCroce.

Southington High School received a grant for a planned "student sunshine program," proposed by teacher Sharon

DePucchio. This activity will recruit students to provide meals and other items for students who are struggling as a result of emergency situations.

The foundation has already gotten started on the next round of fundraising.

A recent activity at Outback Steakhouse

brought in \$5,000, and the group hopes the next round of grants will be larger.

"This is an inspirational day," said SEF board member Dawn Miceli. "We have now officially seen our goal come to fruition."

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