

School foundation nears its goal for endowment fund

By Randy Roberts

Star Gazette staff writer

In 1997, former Hastings school district superintendent Wayne Haugen's vision of creating a major funding source to supplement public school funds came to light with the formation of the Hastings Public Schools Foundation.

The original board members, which included independent School District 200 board member Leslie Nielsen, created a permanent endowment to fund special and innovative projects and activities that could not be paid for through public funds.

The team of founding board members, which also included Don Eddy (first president), Bob Aturia, Sharon Avent, Jean Langlais, Sue Langlais Steveken, Penny Pettit, Dave Dotson, and later Carrie Jo Short, Pinky McNamara and John Poepf, laid the groundwork for the endowment, which upon reaching \$1 million in private

donations would be distributed in the form of grants for various public school needs.

No grants have been awarded yet, but the original goal of \$1 million has nearly been reached. Through the generosity of two board members who have agreed to match any gifts given to the Foundation during the last quarter of 2003, the goal may soon be eclipsed, with the possibility of grants being disbursed to classrooms in 2004.

"The response has been phenomenal," Nielsen said. "Donors obviously see this as an excellent opportunity for their dollars to make a large difference. Every dollar which is given is matched two-to-one. One hundred dollar gifts suddenly become \$300. This sort of generosity is indicative of the enthusiasm for the long-term positive effects of the Foundation."

"We are within reach of the goal and are thrilled to know that the dollars we all have given will generate interest income, which will fund grants for countless generations of students," Avent said.

Nielsen said the grants will be disbursed at a 5-percent rate per year (\$50,000 per \$1 million in the fund).

"Grants made at that level will make a significant difference in the educational opportunities of many students per year," she said.

What the grants go toward is really up to the imagination of the teachers who request them. Generally, the grants will go toward projects that would not likely be included in the public school budget. The opportunities the grants will make possible include — but by no means is limited to — classroom speakers, field trips, science experiments, communicating with classrooms around the globe and much more.

It is important to note that the Hastings Public Schools Foundation funds are totally made possible through private donations and are entirely separate from the public school budget.

Last fund-raiser was held at Carpenter Nature Center

HPSF funds could not be used to pay salaries, purchase regular textbooks, or cover transportation or utility costs.

The Foundation board will be working to get the message out to the community and Hastings schools alumni to increase the donor base. Nielsen said there are about 200 volunteers who have headed fund-raising activities, mailings, marketing and communication with the public.

"These volunteers are incredibly important to the organization and with each new person, we gain more energy and insight into how we can augment education," Nielsen said.

Awareness

The community became more aware of HPSF in 2001 when the Foundation organized its first "Uncommon Gathering," which featured legendary comedian/actor Bob Newhart. The event netted

\$190,000, with about 800 people attending at the newly opened high school. The evening included dinner and a musical entertainment by the high school choirs, bands and orchestra, with WCCO-TV anchor Don Shelby serving as master of ceremonies. A silent auction also raised \$29,000.

Just prior to the event, Avent and McNamara each committed \$250,000 to the Foundation, the most any individual has given to date.

"Their generosity and involvement has ensured the eventual success of the Foundation," Haugen said.

In 2003, HPSF hosted a more casual "Uncommon Gathering," at Carpenter Nature Center, which featured Boogie Wonderland as entertainment. About 900 people attended the event, which did not raise as much money as the Newhart program because of lower ticket prices and additional costs

for the outdoor venue, but more contacts with prospective donors were made.

Today, there are approximately 1,200 individual donors. Nielsen said many donors have given in excess of \$10,000, and many more have given at least \$1,000.

"It's been rewarding to be part of the growth of the Hastings Public Schools Foundation from inception to now," Avent said. "The community is truly working with us to work toward the initial million dollar goal. This is something we can all be proud of."

"From Day One the Foundation board members were confident that \$1 million could be raised for the permanent endowment," Haugen said. "That hasn't wavered."

Teachers, get ready

Although the goal of \$1 million has not quite been reached, teachers might begin to think about spe-

cial and innovative projects, activities and other uses for HPSF funds. There is a grants procedure committee in place. Those members include Short, Pat Rebarchik, Sue Hendrickson, ISD 200 board member Ann Skoglund, Langlais, Nielsen and Lisa Sieben. Short is a grant reviewer for the St. Paul Foundation and adds insight to the process. When grants are requested, a grant review team will look over all grants and determine the disbursing of funds.

Donor/volunteer info

Anyone wishing to donate to the Hastings Public Schools Foundation or to volunteer can call Jean Langlais at 438-3289 or Leslie Nielsen at 437-3184. To be on the HPSF mailing list, call Lisa Sieben at 438-3789.