



Wednesday, January 05, 2011

Local Foundation Funds Spring Programs at School

By Bill Chaisson

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The Trumansburg Central School District (TCSD) Foundation has just made its grant awards for the fall round of applications. The six grants will be going out to teachers in the elementary, middle, and high schools to supplement their straitened budgets. "We give awards to projects in the community," said the TCSD Foundation board president Hayden Brainard, Jr., "to teachers who have no budget for things that we had as kids."

Brainard grew up in Trumansburg and went through the local schools, as did his wife Sarah. He is now a partner at the Miller Mayer law firm in Ithaca and sending his own two children through the same school system. The older child is in the first grade and the younger will begin kindergarten in the fall. Brainard first became involved as a member of the foundation's finance committee and became president of the board in June 2009. His two-year term ends this coming June.

A group of community members organized the foundation in 2006. "During 2006 and 2007 we were doing organizational work," Brainard said. "It was not something the public would have noticed. We put in place systems that would be easy to operate and began building a solid base of donors, although I still run into people who don't know about us."

The foundation has three programs: the grants program, Trumansburg Kids Explore and Discover (TKED), and most recently, a scholarship that they give to a graduating senior.

Its grants program has a fall and a spring funding cycle, timed to coordinate with school semesters. The spring cycle will begin May 1 and end May 31 with the awards being decided and handed out in time for the fall semester. The grants that were just awarded for the spring came out of an application pool that was collected during the month of November.

Three grants went to the elementary school. The art program received \$300 to pay for acrylic mirrors and a digital camera for a unit focused on self-portraiture. The third-grade social studies program received \$900 for a three-week program on Irish culture, including exposure to the dance, music, and language.

A guided reading program in the elementary school received an unusually large amount of money. "That was made possible with money given directly by two donors," said Brainard, "plus funds from the foundation." Sixty books will be purchased for kindergarten through fourth grade students who need to develop reading strategies.

The middle school grant will fund a three-day residency (\$800) with Victoria Armstrong, who will introduce students to the history, dance and music of northeastern Canada.

High school students in AP biology and college chemistry received \$500 to develop and implement a unit on the applied biochemistry of fuels. Students in the arts will now spend \$597 on digital portfolio equipment with which they will prepare materials necessary to apply to art institutes.

"In the first few years we didn't get many grant requests," said Brainard. "Now we are getting a good flow of grant applications. Members of the TCSD Foundation appeared at several faculty meetings to make presentations."

The foundation formerly focused on projects that would assist with curriculum development and on new technology. "Now we stay away from those two boxes," Brainard said, "and just say 'Send it in and we'll consider it.'" In addition to directly funding school programs, the TCSD Foundation has given money to the local library, the Trumansburg Community Nursery School, and other institutions that work with the public schools.

The TKED program is carried out in cooperation with the Discovery Trail, a group of seven non-profits in Tompkins County. "It kicked off last year," said Brainard. "Kindergarteners went to the public library and found out how it works." Students in grade levels through the sixth grade go on field trips to the Laboratory of Ornithology, the Cayuga Nature Center, the ScienCenter, the Johnson Museum of Art, the History Center, and the Plantations. "This year the trips will start in mid-January," said the board president. "They are made possible by funding from the Community Foundation and other funders in Ithaca."

Last June Hilary Swartwood received the TCSD Foundation's first \$250 scholarship. "It is given to a graduating senior in recognition of community service that they have done," Brainard said. "This year we will have a more extensive interview process."

The TCSC Foundation does not hold fundraising events. "Other organizations in town do a lot of them already," said Brainard. "We don't want to compete with them, we want to work with them." The foundation expands its base of donors through word of mouth. "There are at least a dozen people who have been on the board and have now gone off it. They are out in the community talking to people about the foundation."

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