

Rockland foundation helps pay for new computer labs

Money provided by education foundation makes computer upgrades possible

By Allison Manning

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ROCKLAND —

When former Rockland High School Principal A. Scott MacKinlay formed the Rockland Education Foundation in 1996, he was just hoping the group could stay afloat in the ocean of fundraising causes.

Thirteen years later, the academic booster club has awarded grants totaling \$285,000 and tucked away \$130,000 to start an endowment.

“This has been the kind of an adventure that has gone way beyond anything I would have personally thought about,” MacKinlay said.

Each school year, teachers apply for grants – usually of less than \$1,000 – for classroom programs not funded by the school budget. Money has been sought for everything from a dinosaurs and fossil unit at the Esten Elementary School to the purchasing of graphing calculators for high school math classes.

Not wanting to be a replacement for the school budget, the foundation has always relied on getting applications directly from the teachers. But in 2007, after raising nearly \$38,000, putting \$20,000 toward programs and saving the usual 20 percent, the group was left with \$11,000. With technology improvements in mind, the foundation asked Superintendent John Retchless to suggest uses for the money.

Retchless said the Jefferson School, the town’s smallest elementary school, had hand-me-down Macintosh computers purchased in the mid-1990s and was in desperate need of a computer upgrade.

“Budget woes have kicked the heck out of technology,” MacKinlay said.

With the \$11,000 from the foundation and \$2,000 from the Jefferson Parents Advisory Committee, 20 new Hewlett-Packard desktop computers were installed in the school last March.

This past year, after raising another \$38,000, the group set aside \$18,000 as “motivational money” for the Memorial Park and Esten elementary schools – \$9,000 for each.

By utilizing “N computing,” the schools were able to spend just \$15,000 each for the equivalent of 30 computers, Technology Coordinator Tim Wells said. The schools’ parents advisory committees raised the rest of the money that was spent.

Six computer hubs were purchased; they allow up to eight students to share the resources of one computer. The stations were installed in the last few weeks.

With the new computers, students won’t have to endure endless pop-ups and error messages when using Web-based educational programs.

“I can’t say enough how the Rockland Education Foundation has helped us out,” Wells said. “It’s a huge advantage.”

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