

St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation

Spring Newsletter 2011



Professional choreographer Rikki Stokes works with high school students on a dance number for the production of "Oklahoma!"
photo | Spencer Butler

Choir steps toward professionalism with choreographer for "Oklahoma!"

Hannah Sieff | staff writer

Rikki Stokes lives in Los Angeles, works in Minnesota and is now taking a trip to "Oklahoma!"

The production is being performed by the St. Louis Park Senior High choir program, which includes Women's Choir, Concert Choir and Park Singers. Performances are on March 2 at 1 p.m. and March 3-5 at 7 p.m. The cost is \$10 for adults and \$7 for seniors and students.

The St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation (SLPPSF) will host a root beer float reception following the play.

All of the money raised from the production will go directly to the choir program. The goal is to bring in enough profit for the show to be self-sustaining, with hopefully more money left over. The extra profit will be used for scholarships for choir events, such as past tours in Chicago and Disney World.

The program has received outside help from the SLPPSF in the form of a grant for \$1,500. This money went directly toward hiring choreographer Rikki Stokes, who has worked with stars such as Janet Jackson, Prince, and Kesha, among many others.

"It's been a blessing to get this added source of revenue. [Rikki Stokes] has been fantastic with the kids," choir director John

Myszkowski said.

Stokes used his experience to help the kids grow as performers.

"I'm coming from a professional background, so I'm bringing that aspect to the kids," Stokes said.

In addition, the program can allocate more

"Working with him has been amazing. He knows exactly what he wants, and he's great with managing people."

Ashley Slattery | senior

money toward additional microphones, scenery, costumes, and publicity due to the offset of costs for a choreographer.

Choir students involved in "Oklahoma!" will experience the advantages of the grant both now and in the future.

"I told [John Myszkowski] that if I could be first in line on the roster to do more projects, then I would do it," Stokes said. "I love working with kids and I want to be involved from here on out because I believe that continuity

is really important when working with kids."

The students involved in the choir program are enthusiastic about working with Stokes.

"Working with him has been amazing. He knows exactly what he wants, and he's great with managing people," senior Ashley Slattery said.

Freshman Emmett Bongaarts said he agrees with Slattery.

"It has been a lot of fun working with both Mr. Myszkowski and Rikki and it has been an exciting experience. They really try to make it fun," Bongaarts said.

Stokes's involvement has boosted the production's meaning and quality according to Myszkowski.

"A show like this is so collaborative. It doesn't mean as much to the kids if there are not a lot of people collaborating on it. There's going to be a higher quality experience out of all the components of the show," Myszkowski said.

Slattery believes having a professional choreographer will help heighten the quality of the show and the students' enthusiasm.

"The whole show is about having fun, and it's going to come across on stage really well," Slattery said.

Featured Grants

Park Spanish Immersion book room fosters reading development

Emma Vitale | staff writer

With the goal of allowing students at Park Spanish Immersion (PSI) to develop as readers at their own pace, the PSI staff sought a \$3,000 grant to provide 500 books for the Guided Reading Book Room.

Thanks to the SLPPSF grant, the long-desired addition of a book room to PSI is finally a reality.

"Teachers have been wanting this and have been pushing for a room like this for a long time. It's going to benefit the kids in such a big way by opening up so many opportunities for learning," PSI literacy coach Sally Goddard said.

The book room, which had its grand opening Feb. 9, houses many books of varying Spanish levels and is an easy way for teachers to find the educational and fun books their students need.

"It is really challenging to find high-quality Spanish reading materials for developing students," Goddard said. "And with this guided reading room, kids can choose and read books at whatever reading level they are at, which I think is extremely important because it's essential for students, especially at PSI, to read books suited to them and to develop their reading at their own pace."

The books are used during literacy blocks in the classroom, when students are reading independently or when teachers are working with small groups.

The SLPPSF's contribution provided the impetus for the book room and was crucial to its organization and success said God-

dard.

"The room was really able to be created because of the Foundation's grant, and we are so thankful," Goddard said. "The grant was the opportunity for us to get the resources and was the push that allowed the system to get underway."

With the grant for the guided reading book room at PSI, the SLPPSF has been able to uphold their goal of funding district programs in reading and illustrated its continued support for Park schools.



Students at PSI utilize the Book Room with help from their teacher
photo | Sally Goddard

SLPSH counselors continue four-year plan for Career Center

Hannah Sieff | staff writer

St. Louis Park Senior High (SLPSH) students have new opportunities to explore options in colleges and careers as a result of money granted by the SLPPSF.

The grant was given to the Career Center at the SLPSH for the second year in a row and was \$10,000 for 500 hours of stipend.

The SLPSH counselors and interns hope to create a place for students in grades 9-12 to utilize materials related to future college and career plans. The grant has given the Career Center a foundation to build upon in coming years

"We're laying the foundation for a

solid, four-year plan for the students at the high school," SLPSH counselor Barb Nelson said.

Last year's grant money largely went to hiring another person to work on site. This year, the money is going toward expanding the resources of the center.

During second semester, the counselors hope to extend the hours and buy new computers, catalogues, and resource books. They hope to have a grand reopening within the next few months.

The Career Center also began advisory sessions during the early-release and late start days. A large amount of emphasis

during these sessions is placed on juniors, helping them learn about their various options prior to the college admission process. An example of this was the Career Fair on Feb. 3, which gave juniors an opportunity to discover new career fields.

The counselors are grateful to the St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation for providing them the money necessary to create and finalize a center that will provide students with resources.

"It's nice to know there are people out there watching, who care and are concerned about the future of the St. Louis Park youth," Nelson said.

Elementary grant provides new interactive reading curriculum

Abi Tupa | staff writer



Students use new "Sing, Spell, Read, Write" curriculum in Ruliffson's classroom

photo | Lindsay Ruliffson

Despite a meager personal classroom budget, Special Education teacher Lindsay Ruliffson was able to introduce a new curriculum to her students this fall, thanks to the "Learning Through Music" grant.

The \$3,000 grant allowed Ruliffson to purchase a program entitled "Sing, Spell, Read, Write" for her kindergarten through fifth-grade Special Education students at Peter Hobart Elementary. This unique curriculum takes a new approach for getting students with learning disabilities excited about reading.

"The program is a multisensory approach to reading," Ruliffson said. "It has lots of songs that have great scope and sequence, but music is just one piece. There are lots of different avenues to learn about letters."

Additional mediums of learning range from crafts to cooking, which keep the students interested in lessons, a common obstacle for Special Education students, according to Ruliffson.

"My students are a group with pretty significant cognitive disabilities and this is really the first time I've seen them engaged in the literary piece (of school)," Ruliffson said. "The kids have really taken ownership of it, and knowing the severity of their disabilities, it is good to see their motivation."

As indicated by its name, one of the curriculum's key aspects is the musical element, which provided students with a new way to learn and remember sounds of letters and words.

"Music gives (students) another mode to learn through. They enjoy it and the words stick. I've always known they loved music, but it's great to see them learning through it," Ruliffson said.

However, introducing this program would not have been possible without aid from the St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation she said.

"This (grant) has given my students an opportunity they wouldn't have otherwise because we did not have the monetary amount (needed)," Ruliffson said.

Grants and Greetings

Foundation allots annual funding

Abi Tupa | staff writer

Education can be an expensive undertaking, today more than ever.

It is for this reason that every spring, the St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation selects new grant recipients from throughout the district based on expressed need from teacher and administrator applications.

"We (SLPPSF) understand the constraints school districts experience as a result of costs and feel we can play a roll in the district by donating," Grants Director Lorraine Boyle said. "We feel fortunate to support teachers in enhancing learning opportunities."

In order to achieve this goal, the SLPPSF assembles a subcommittee of their Foundation Board to review applications and determine how to most effectively distribute funding.

"We use a criteria to evaluate all of the applications," Grants Coordinator Ed Skelly said. "We try to ensure we have the most reach in terms of number of students affected and how they (possible grant recipients) fit the Foundation's mission."

The committee also tries to distribute money evenly throughout all the district's schools to benefit students of all grade levels.

With an annual budget of approximately \$30,000, the SLPPSF is normally able to award 10 grants ranging in value from \$500 to \$10,000.

In return for funding, the SLPPSF requires a written report of the progress made by the grant funding, as well as participation in the Mini Grant Fair the following spring to showcase the benefit of the grants. Recipients create a poster highlighting results and reactions to the programs they have started with the help of funding.

"The Grant Fair is a great way to let other staff members see what has been done and encourage them to apply themselves," Skelly said.

How to apply for a grant:

Teachers and administrations within the St. Louis Park School District are invited to apply for grants by visiting slppsf.com to download an application form.

Grant applications must indicate the scope of students affected and pertain to one of the SLPPSF's five focus areas: math and science, reading, the arts, or transitional programs.

Applications for funding in the 2011-2012 school year are due April 15, 2011. Email notifications will be sent out May 30, 2011, detailing the final grant recipients.

Grant Questions: Answered

Committee Chair Lorraine Boyle and Grants Coordinator Ed Skelly clarify the logistics of the grant process for district applicants.

Q: Who are the prime candidates for a grant?

Skelly: It has to be someone associated with the school district, whether from Special Education, preschool, or K-12.

Q: Why would someone seek aid in the form of a grant from the SLPPSF?

Skelly: If a teacher has found a hole in their curriculum, or if they have an idea for a teaching tool, we can help fund that. It's an opportunity to enhance programming.

Q: Where does the SLPPSF acquire the money to award these grants?

Boyle: Both the community as well as individual donors help fund the foundation, but we continue to look for new ways of raising money. We would like to be much larger and make larger donations

Gratitude greetings show staff appreciation, fund district schools

Abi Tupa | staff writer

As children, it's one of the first formalities we learn to say: 'thank you.'

The St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation offers a unique way for district students and their families to do just this, through "Gratitude Greetings." With a small donation to the foundation, families can send these simple thank-you cards to educators who have been influential to their students learning experiences.

"Gratitude Greetings provide families with a way to say 'thank you' at the end of each school year," foundation volun-

teer Joan Brinkman said. "It's a way that all participants in the district can help the schools."

Any donation allows families to send the greetings to as many staff members and they wish, in as many buildings across the district as they wish.

The funds collected through donations are used by the foundation to provide grants for district schools benefiting every age group, from Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE) to the Senior High. Thus, not only do the greetings brighten

teachers' days, but they have the capability to brighten students' futures as well.

While Gratitude Greetings are available year round, the SLPPSF focuses on the initiative each May as the school year draws to a close.

Ways to donate:

1. Mail messages and donation to:
St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation
P.O. Box 26393
St. Louis Park, MN 55426

Indicate the name of the educator to receive the message and the building in which he or she works.

2. Visit slppsf.org to write a greeting message and make a donation by credit card. The link "Gratitude Greetings" can be found under the link "For Donors."



A sample Gratitude Greeting photo | Joan Brinkman

Charitable giving: what's the point?

Emma Vitale | staff writer

With a multitude of opportunities available for supporting the Park community, why choose the schools?

"Supporting the public schools is perhaps one of, if not the, most important thing a community can do for itself," Park mayor Jeff Jacobs said. "Good schools are critical to the vitality and health of any community. Once they start to fail the entire place fails; whether you have kids in the schools or not, people simply do not want to live in a place where the schools do not have the money or public support to educate their kids."

The St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation, with its mission of enhancing learning for the students of Park schools, plays a significant role in supporting the education of students.

Because it is a non-profit run solely by volunteers, the SLPPSF relies on the St. Louis Park community to show its commitment to the schools through donations.

Education is vital to the success of future generations, and supporting the schools is an important way to ensure the continued quality of Park education.

"Kids are the scientists that will invent the next big thing, the next Internet, the next cure for cancer and the way out of dependence on foreign energy, just to name a few things we are looking to the next generation to accomplish," Jacobs said. "Without a decent education how will they do that? Answer: they won't and we will all suffer for that failure to support the schools."

St. Louis Park is consistently regarded as a high achieving school district, and its students perform extremely well thanks to its guidance and quality. Donor support is crucial to the SLPPSF's ability to provide students with enhanced education, and makes St. Louis Park schools the very best they can be.

"So please, tell people, from the highest mountaintop you can find: You want to help yourself -- help the schools. You want to insure your property values -- help the schools. You want to insure the continued economic vitality of society -- help the schools," Jacobs said. "Give them your time, your money and your energy, whether you have kids there or not - maybe especially if you don't because the continued viability of democracy depends on it."

How to donate:

1. Go online to the website at <http://www.slppsf.org> and click on "Donate Now."
2. Volunteers are welcome to donate their time. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, visit the SLPPSF website and contact president Peter Levy.

A special thank you to our 2009 - 2010 business donors:

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Staff:
 Katie Johns
 Hannah Sieff
 Abigail Tupa
 Emma Vitale

Advisor:
 Joan Brinkman

Special thanks to Lori Keekley for allowing staff to use resources and board members contacted for information.

Board Members		
Title	Name	Contact Information
PRESIDENT	Peter Levy	pblevy@gmail.com
TREASURER	Bob Hendrickson	rhendrickson@hotmail.com
SECRETARY	Mim Kagol	kagolm@aol.com
FALL EVENT COORDINATOR, PLANNED GIVING	Curt Rahman	curtrahman@gmail.com
SCHOOL LIAISON	Joan Brinkman	brinkman.joan@gmail.com
GRANTS DIRECTOR	Lorraine Boyle	lboyle5@comcast.net
EMAIL MARKETING	Melissa Worthington	mw@worthington.com
FUNDRAISING	Charles Goldstein, Matt Stangl	charles@fmlylaw.com matt_strangl@hotmail.com
WEBMASTER	Tracy Vig	tracy.vig@honeywell.com
SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVE	Bruce Richardson	brichardson@mnrubber.com
GRANTS COORDINATOR	Ed Skelly	edskelly@comcast.net