

Eagan Foundation looks to expand charitable reach

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Local scholarship organization hopes to meet even more community needs by increasing visibility, donations

by Erin Johnson

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Since 1991, the Eagan Foundation has awarded more than 600 college scholarships to Eagan high school students and managed money for local nonprofits such as Friends of the Eagan Core Greenway.

But a mostly new board of directors is hoping to expand the role of the Eagan Foundation to meet even more community needs.

To do that, the organization is aiming to increase its donor base not only among the business community, but also with individual citizens.

“The Eagan Foundation has a long history, and we want people to know we’re around and know the important role we can play in addressing community needs,” said Eagan Foundation Chair Janelle Waldock.

The organization grew out of discussions in 1990 between Eagan educators and business people interested in creating a scholarship program for seniors at the newly created Eagan High School, said Board Member Laurie Halverson.

Since that time, the Eagan Foundation has distributed nearly \$700,000 in scholarships to Eagan students, community programs and charitable initiatives.

It has also served as the fiscal agent for such local groups as the Eagan Teen Advisory Board, the Patriot's Plaza in Central Park, and the Pass Christian (Katrina flood relief) Project.

The organization saw a turnover of nearly half its board members in October, which has brought a renewed energy to the nonprofit, Waldock said.

“I think anytime an organization changes its leadership to that magnitude there are fresh ideas and a new burst of energy in figuring out the role the organization wants to play in the community,” she said.

The Eagan Foundation recognizes the many community needs that exist – especially in a downturned economy – and sees the potential for a much more substantial grant program, Waldock said.

The organization can serve as a one-stop shop for those who want to give locally, she said. People can feel confident that there is a board of directors assessing needs, identifying and looking into organizations, and placing dollars where the needs are greatest.

“We serve as a great umbrella organization,” she said. “There are a lot of individual community members who see the needs around them and may not know the best source to give their money to. We can help with that.”

Eagan residents can see their donations go directly to work in their community, whether helping high school students go to college, supporting community arts programs, or funding organizations that supply basic necessities to people struggling through tough economic times, Halverson said.

To reach more potential donors, the organization plans to launch a proactive marketing effort and make some direct connections with leaders in the business community.

A city the size of Eagan has enormous potential to build an endowment fund, she said.

“The Eagan Foundation has a history of great support from Eagan’s business community, from our largest employers to mom-and-pop shops,” she said. “The support of our business sector has been vital for the growth of the Eagan Foundation.”

The group is also inviting the community to its largest fundraising event, the ninth annual Wine Tasting and Silent Auction, which is scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m. on April 22 at the Eagan Community Center.

“The Eagan Foundation really works its mission to make Eagan the best place to live, work, play and learn,” Halverson said. “One hundred percent of board members are individual donors, and our annual wine event serves as another avenue for individuals to support the Eagan Foundation.”

For more information on the Eagan Foundation or to make a donation online, visit www.eaganfoundation.com.

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