

Businesses stepping up to help schools make ends meet

Cuts in education mean fundraising is filling the void

By Lillian Cox

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NORTH COUNTY — Local business owners stepping up to fill funding shortfalls for schools are helping to pay for more than extracurricular activities.

The money also goes to help support academic studies.

Dr. John A. Coleman has a dental practice adjacent to Vista Magnet Middle School for Technology, Science & Math.

“We've supported local band and football teams through fundraising,” Coleman said. “Then we heard about cuts in education. With Vista Magnet across the street, it seemed appropriate.”

In February and March, Coleman offered teeth whitening services at half price with proceeds going to the school. Participants wrote a check for \$150 to Vista Magnet's PTA.

“I had only one request and that was that funds go directly to classroom activities such as biology or chemistry experiments, as opposed to the general fund,” he said. “Biology, chemistry, physics and math is what we do every day in this office.”

The \$3,000 that Coleman's office raised paid for the school's first science fair.

During February and March, the fundraising program to benefit Vista Magnet Middle School will continue. The half-price teeth whitening offer will be open to parents and the public.

Coleman said he hopes to expand the fundraising to benefit other schools in the Vista Unified School District.

“We're hoping to eventually extend the program to other schools such as Vista High School and (Rancho) Buena Vista High School,” Coleman said.

Charter schools also receive fundraising money to help pay for programs and equipment.

Take the Classical Academies, for example. The Classical Academies is a group of three charter schools – the Coastal Academy in Oceanside and the Classical Academy in Escondido serve

kindergarten through eighth grade and the Classical Academy High School in Escondido serves grades nine through 12.

Business sponsors underwrite many of the schools' programs in art and music, computers and technology, science and engineering, and foreign languages. In turn, the schools promote the sponsors' products and services to parents and students.

Ecowater Systems was one of the first businesses to sign up for the program. The company's John Yanchewski contributed \$1,000 to the school's musical production of "Seussical, Junior" last spring. Then a parent approached Yanchewski about giving money for a science classroom.

"The funds weren't easy to come by, but we believe that when it comes to education, any money we donate will pay the dividends for our country in the future," Yanchewski said.

Brian P. Smith, the father of a Classical Academy student, is a school sponsor. Smith hosts free seminars on campus in his capacity as a certified college planning specialist.

"I believe in charter schools because they offer families a credible alternative to the mass education system we've built in California," said Smith, who is a credentialed teacher. "I believe in giving back."

During the past 25 years, the Carlsbad Educational Foundation has contributed more than \$4 million to the Carlsbad Unified School District in facilities fees and direct grants. Legoland is its largest single donor.

Last spring, with the district facing major budget cuts, the foundation paid \$600,000 to continue the services of the district's library media technicians and extracurricular coaching and teaching staff.

Despite the recession, Chief Executive Officer Valin Brown is upbeat about the foundation's ambitious 10-year plan to create a districtwide music program and a science enrichment program, as well as support emerging educational innovation programs.

"Even though times are tough, we believe there's a lot of potential in the community to support kids," Brown said.

Lillian Cox is a freelance writer in Encinitas.