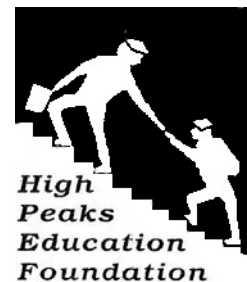


High Peaks Education Foundation

Spring 2008 Newsletter



HPEF's mission is to ensure the long-term survival and health of Keene Central School.

This newsletter is our progress report to the community.

HPEF is run by a volunteer board of trustees, both full and seasonal residents. Sam Fisk is president. Cynthia Johnston, KCS Superintendent, and Board of Education Vice President Kathy Smith are non-voting members. Funding for our work comes from charitable (and tax deductible) gifts from community members who understand the importance of a vibrant school to our town. Donations can be sent to PO Box 475, Keene Valley.

KCS Enrollment Stays Strong

Prospects are good for a slight increase in enrollment at KCS for the upcoming school year. The 3rd and 6th grade classes will be full with 20 students each. This is great news as the most serious threat to the health of the school and the quality of the educational experience for its students is declining enrollment, a problem the school faced between 1999 and 2006. In the last few years the trend has been upward again.

As a small rural town, we face the problem that most of the graduating seniors leave town and don't return here to raise new families. Thus we must constantly attract new families with children to the town in order to keep the school from shrinking. This is a challenge, as there are limited opportunities for employment in the town.

What we have seen lately, however, is an increase in people moving here with jobs elsewhere. Some have jobs in neighboring towns, like Lake Placid. Others telecommute, i.e., work from home for a remote employer, usually using the Internet heavily. These trends are encouraging as they mean we will have a town with more than just retirees living here. HPEF works with local real estate agents to help explain the benefits of living here to new families. We also are strongly involved in improving Internet service to attract more telecommuters (see back page).

KCS also bolsters enrollment by encouraging families in neighboring towns (Lake Placid, Jay, Upper Jay and Elizabethtown) to send their children to KCS. These families pay a tuition fee to offset the costs of these new students. There will be 9 new out-of-town students next year.

Hands-On Nature

Have you ever tried to gnaw a carrot like a beaver gnaws wood? Do you know what grasses and salamanders have in common? Can you think of a way an owl saves energy while flying off with prey?

KCS students in grades K - 5 have spent the year investigating the daily lives of the creatures and plants that surround the school and can answer those questions readily. Eight professionally trained volunteers bring a new chapter into, and outside, the classrooms each month through the Four Winds Hands-On Nature program funded by HPEF.

Lake Winifred, the KCS on-campus pond, has never been examined so closely! Now at the end of the program's first year, volunteers are reporting that it has been a fun, eye-opening experience. The children love it, responding enthusiastically to the varied, experiential course. The program was initiated in response to the school strategic plan recommendation that we make the most of our unique location by incorporating local environment studies into the curriculum.

Angie Cook, who will have two children at KCS next year, is program coordinator. She also coordinated Environmental Awareness Week this spring for all grades K - 12. The costs for her time are funded by HPEF in its continuing commitment to enrich the quality of education at KCS.

HPEF Funds Weather the Storm

HPEF's funds, invested by the Adirondack Community Trust (ACT), have survived the turmoil in financial markets over the past 6 months. They are only down slightly more than 1% since January 1.

Internet Service Improves

HPEF believes that high-quality, broadband Internet service is crucial to the quality of education at KCS and our ability to attract new families to town who telecommute to remote jobs. Since last fall, there have been major improvements to service in town, which is provided by Keene Valley Video and Internet (KVVI).

With the help of a loan from HPEF, KVVI has completely refurbished their existing cabling and electronics, creating a stable base on which to expand the network to other parts of town currently not served.

KVVI has also connected its network to that of Charter Communications, the cable company in Upper Jay. This link has allowed KVVI to significantly increase the capacity of its network and crank up the speed of the services it offers to customers in Keene. As more customers get added to the network, KVVI can now increase its capacity easily with this service from Charter Communications.

This winter HPEF funded a company from Vermont to do a complete mapping of all homes and power poles in the town. With this data we have found that the remaining areas where we need to extend the network involve very long distances.

As a result we have concluded that new expansion in the network should be done using fiber-to-the-home technology and not the older coax cable. Coax has gone up in price dramatically over the past year while fiber for connecting homes has gone down. KVVI has completed a pilot of this new technology on Mason Young road in town and the results are totally positive. Next, we are looking to design a fiber distribution network that covers Spruce Hill and the rest of East Hill. Fiber optic cable has other advantages in reliability and capacity and is right for the future.

To build these extensions we need to raise additional funds. If you are interested in supporting this effort, please contact Dave Mason or Jim Herman, HPEF trustees, at 576-9791.

Buddy System

The HPEF-funded mentoring program matches students with volunteer adults from the community. The pairs meet weekly throughout the year, sharing mutual interests and developing supportive, long-lasting relationships. The goal is not remedial, but instead to enrich the lives of KCS students and keep them excited about learning and growing.

This year, the program's third, there were 20 mentoring teams, overseen by program director Alice Boutte. Beyond serving as communicator, Alice arranges field trips, such as the all-day trip to Albany to watch government in action.

Every child who requests a mentor has one, thanks to Keene's strong community spirit. Most of the mentees are in grades 5 and 6, and many continue beyond that. The middle school years are hectic, with the demands of increased homework and sports, so mentor pairs meet less regularly, but the relationship continues to be an important part of life.

The annual program survey is illuminating. From mentees: "I ♥ my mentor"; "I've had sooooo much fun"; "It gives me a new friend." And from mentors: "We have had a wonderful time discussing the stuff of our weeks"; "I have gained a young friend and affirmed my belief that being with a child or young person is a blessing."

Spain Trip on Track

HPEF is especially enthusiastic about funding programs that introduce our students to other cultures, languages and geography. HPEF is pleased to be an early sponsor of a multi-age trip (grades 9-11) to Spain in 2009 for 16 students. Trip coordinators, Peg Wilson and Sarah Tremblay, report that fund raising efforts have gone well, so far raising \$20,000 of the projected \$26,000 needed. A spring car wash was very successful with the students raising over \$450 in one morning! ¡Qué bueno!

HPEF's mission is to ensure the long-term survival and health of the Keene Central School as a critical institution in our town. HPEF supports the implementation of the KCS Strategic Plan, which covers both growth in student population through recruiting, and enrichment of educational programs for teachers and students of KCS. HPEF is a source of ideas, expertise, funding, connections and volunteers that augments the efforts of KCS administration and teachers, the Board of Education, and the Parent Teacher Association. HPEF focuses on researching feasible alternatives, disseminating accurate and clear information, and launching new initiatives. HPEF is seeking "KCS Ambassadors" who can help us to build support in the community for KCS.