

Fort Mill Foundation grants help local educators, students

By Jonathan Allen
jallen@fortmilltimes.com

FORT MILL TOWNSHIP — Every year, teachers across the district have great ideas to improve the quality of education in area schools, but the school district doesn't always have the money to fund them.

That's where the Foundation for Fort Mill Schools comes in. The foundation doles out \$500 grants to one worthy applicant from each school each year to turn a great idea into a reality.

"One we were really excited about last year came from Amber Martin. It was called 'Science Fair Help Sessions,'" Foundation Director Jill Lauber said.

Martin, a teacher at Riverview Elementary School, identified 98 "at risk" students through PACT scores in science and through other means, and invited them to after school sessions during which they completed a science fair project under the supervision of a teacher. Of the students invited to the sessions, 51 attended, and 49 of them got an A, B or C on the project, Lauber said.

"The upshot is she anticipated a couple of outcomes and it was clear the grant was effective," Lauber said. "The sense of accomplishment the students had was wonderful. On the final session, many of them brought their parents to see their projects."

"That's a real proud moment," Lauber continued, "she got to see these students succeed."

Over the summer, the Foundation decided to change the time of year it dispenses the grants. For the previous two years, since it's inception, the foundation awarded the funds at the end of the school year, so they weren't really used until the following year. This year, however, the Foundation awarded grants for 2007-'08 in May and then turned around and began accepting applications for the 2008-'09 round over the summer.

This year's winners will be announced at the districtwide teachers meeting today.

"The teachers have put a ton of effort into these applications," Lauber said. "Not only do they talk about the curriculum requirements and the nuts and bolts of doing it, they talk about how these skills will help the students for the rest of their lives."

Lauber looks to the district's expansion plans excitedly. More schools means more projects to support.

"Our commitment is going to continue to grow and we look forward to it," she said. "We want to help everybody."