



White Salmon Valley Education Foundation funds pay for several educational programs, including a field trip to the Snowden Wetlands.

Photos courtesy of White Salmon Valley Education Foundation

Foundation Supports Next Generation

White Salmon Valley Education Foundation works to find new ways to support student education

By Jeanie Senior

The community-based nonprofit White Salmon Valley Education Foundation—which turns 11 this year—has an impressive list of accomplishments, not least of which is the \$490,000 already given to school programs.

Even with the foundation's success, Executive Director Anne-Marie Slater says there is still work to do. The \$900,000 endowment, for example, needs to increase to at least \$1 million—a sum that would generate a sustainable, long-term source of income.

"Now we're actively fundraising to accomplish our goals," Anne-Marie says.

Twenty-five percent of money raised goes to the endowment to provide a sustainable, long-term source of income.

She says initial discussions focused on

a clear goal.

"We were seeking a way to support the schools," Anne-Marie says.

That meant raising money. So they formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and local residents Wallace and Priscilla Stevenson stepped forward with a three-year, \$50,000 a year matching grant, which raised that amount and more each year.

Area businesses large and small, individuals and civic organizations all contributed.

"They've all been there for us," Anne-Marie says.

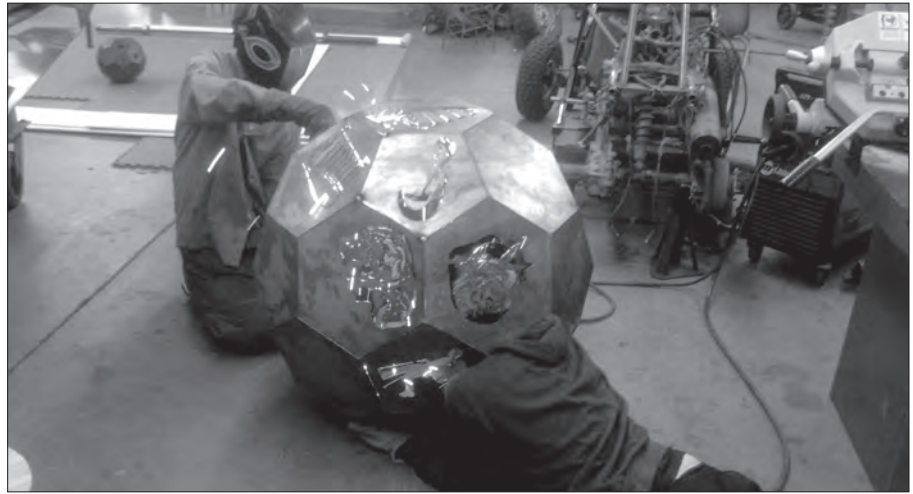
Early on, the foundation hired a part-time grant writer. At this point, \$40,000 invested in grant writing has yielded more than \$2 million in grant monies distributed to the schools. That is in addition to the more than \$40,000 in

awards distributed annually to schools by the foundation. All of the White Salmon Valley district's schools, including Whitson Elementary, Wallace and Priscilla Stevenson Intermediate, and Henkle Middle and Columbia High, can qualify for foundation money.

Teachers apply for foundation money through a formal process, submitting an application after getting approval from their school principal. A review committee—which includes a teacher, a foundation board member and a member of the community—reviews applications and scores them.

"We take the administration of funds very seriously," Anne-Marie says. "We're very fiscally conservative, and we work hard to maintain the integrity of our organization."

As well as seeking donations, the



All money raised by the foundation benefits local schools and programs, including, clockwise from top left, Chromebooks for classroom use; a plasma cutter for Columbia High School's metal shop, iPads for elementary students and equipment for an underwater aquatics class. Above left, Executive Director Anne-Marie Slater says that even with the success of the foundation, there is still work to do.

foundation holds fundraising events. The 10th annual Grape Escape in 2016 raised \$99,000. During The Night Out for Schools in late March, local stores and restaurants will donate a portion of their proceeds to the foundation. Donations also can be made at the foundation website, www.wsvef.org/donate.

Anne-Marie says she continues to be impressed by the local community and “just the value of what equal access to public education means for all. Education opens the door for everyone.”

That aligns with the foundation's motto: A community of kids with a world of opportunity.

Foundation grants pay for a variety of programs across the grades, from robotics to a wetlands field trip.

Foundation-funded programs include:

- \$4,300 for Physics of Flight classes in afterschool sessions. Students built

complex balsa wood airplanes, then moved on to constructing quadcopters.

- Band instruments for all students in grades five to eight. “It inspires kids to have the equipment they need,” says music teacher Ryan Murkfeldt, noting that the seventh- and eighth-grade bands previously had 12 members. “We have about 40 now.”

- A \$16,000 plasma cutter in the Columbia High School metal shop, part of an ongoing move to more modern, computer-based machine tool equipment.

- 80-plus iPads, mostly for the elementary school, and a number of Chromebook laptops.
- Theater productions, including paying for a sound system, headsets and lighting.

“We’re not lagging here with the modernization of our equipment,”

Anne-Marie says. “There are thriving and growing programs.”

The foundation also has awarded grants to teachers for professional development.

“We believe in investing in teachers,” she says. “They’re the ones who are with the students every day.”

The foundation is hiring a new executive director.

“It’s time for the next generation to carry on the torch,” says Anne-Marie, who says her volunteer involvement will not diminish. “I have a vested interest. I believe strongly in the mission. I’m a lifetime supporter.

“I’m very thankful for the people I’ve met and had a chance to work with. We’ve been able to do something good together. Whatever you can do to support children and teachers, that’s a worthy cause.” ■