



SONORA AREA FOUNDATION
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News Release

For immediate release

From: Sonora Area Foundation

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Foundation grants support senior peer counseling, Youth dental care and more

Popular and effective programs that provide peer counseling for elders and basic dental care for thousands of Tuolumne County school children both received major support to continue services through recent grants from the Sonora Area Foundation and Irving J. Symons Foundation for Tuolumne County, a supporting organization of Sonora Area Foundation.

Senior Peer Counseling, a program of the Tuolumne County Behavior Health Department was awarded a \$30,000 grant to expand community recruitment and training. The program currently serves 95 seniors and has a waiting list of more than 20 at-risk clients. The grant, awarded through the Irving J. Symons Foundation for Tuolumne County, a supporting organization of Sonora Area Foundation, will support quarterly training and support for up to 25 senior volunteers who make home visits to seniors referred to the program by family, health professionals and social workers.

And Smile Keepers, a program that provides dental screenings and preventative dental hygiene services for more than 3,300 Tuolumne County students, received a \$25,000 matching grant to continue this school year. Now in its 14th year, Smile Keepers had its state funding cut earlier this year. Program advocates held a fall fundraising campaign to continue services, and the Sonora Area Foundation matched every dollar raised up to \$25,000.

“When our state funds were cut, we knew we had to act,” said Smile Keepers Coordinator Erika Hagstrom Dossi. “We’re the county’s only school-based dental program and we see more than 3,350 children every year for dental screenings and preventative care.”

Program supporters actually exceeded the match, securing \$34,000 in private donations to continue services for two more years.

The two grants were among many awarded by the Foundation in the last quarter. Additional recent grant awards are detailed below:

Musical instruments for classrooms – Young students throughout Tuolumne County will be able to learn music basics with high quality xylophones, thanks to a project championed by retired music teacher Louise McPeters and the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools office. The Foundation helped to purchase a classroom set of the instruments, which participating grade school teachers can check out for several weeks at a time for use in their classrooms. More than 16 teachers have already been trained in how to use the instruments to teach basic music concepts including reading music, rhythm and tone.

Youth grief education – Up to 30 local teens will receive education and support from the Dawn’s Light Center this school year, to help them deal with life-changing losses due to family crises or death of a loved one. A \$5,000 grant will help Dawn’s Light coordinate and follow through on services to teens.

Gold Rush Black Heritage Project – The history of African Americans in Tuolumne County’s Gold Rush days will be the topic of a new brochure, website and heritage tourism project planned by the new Mother Lode Black Heritage Foundation. A \$4,000 grant from the Irving J. Symons Foundation for Tuolumne County, a supporting organization of Sonora Area Foundation, supports travel and research on the little-known history of more than 5,000 African Americans who were part of the California Gold Rush. Among them were William Sugg and his family, whose downtown Sonora home is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Small Business Center – A new small business development center is now open several days a week offering business counseling and other services, thanks in part to a \$5,000 grant to Tuolumne County’s new Economic Development Authority. The new center is a joint program of the EDA and the Small Business Development Center’s Modesto office.

WATCH Resources support – WATCH, a program offering support services to developmentally disabled adults in Tuolumne County for 30 years, received a \$6,310 grant to help upgrade its computers and software. WATCH serves more than 185 adults with special needs, and provides housing, supported living and employment, social and recreational services and transportation.

Dance benefit – Sponsors of the benefit Dancing With Tuolumne County Stars received a \$2,846 grant to help with insurance and other expenses for the event, held this summer at the Columbia College Oak Pavilion. The event raised funds for the service club Omega Nu, the Columbia College Foundation and several other local charities.

Sierra Repertory Theatre – Sierra Rep received a \$20,000 grant to support its year-round season of live stage productions, and to help cover new costs at the Fallon House Theatre. SRT, now in its 30th year, is entering a new lease with the state park to operate in the historic theater, and will be facing increased costs for utilities, insurance and maintenance.

The Sonora Area Foundation was established in 1990, and is a Community Foundation that channels donors’ charitable contributions to worthy projects in Tuolumne County. Its mission is to strengthen its community by promoting philanthropy through assisting donors, making grants and providing leadership.

The Foundation, along with two supporting organizations, The Irving J. Symons Foundation and the Symons Family Fund, now have assets of more than \$24 million. The governing boards regularly award grants that fulfill needs in Tuolumne County. Those grants will total over \$1,700,000 in 2009, and exceed \$13 million since inception. The Sonora Area Foundation also administers more than 180 charitable funds set up for scholarships and other charitable causes.

The Sonora Area Foundation is certified as having achieved the National Standards of Excellence for U.S. Community Foundations by the Council on Foundations and is a member of the League of California Community Foundations.

For more information on grant applications or the establishment of a donor fund, contact the Foundation at 209-533-2596 or the website www.sonora-area.org.