

SMMEF campaign enters home stretch

Jeff Goodman



Note: This is the first of two stories about the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation's fundraising campaign.

With seven weeks left in the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation's annual fundraising campaign, officials remain hopeful that they can raise the \$770,000 still needed to prevent programming cuts in local schools.

The Santa Monica-Malibu school district's fundraising arm has raised more than \$1.7 million since July 1 for arts education, instructional assistants and enrichment grants for science and other activities, but it remains short of its \$2.5-million goal with the school year drawing to a close.

"We're eternal optimists," SMMEF board president Kathleen Rawson said. "We have to be. We always believe that if we're able to get the message out that participation from any family benefits their own kid, people will understand that. ... People need to feel this is non-negotiable. The idea of cutting the programs breaks my heart. We refuse to give up."

Families in the school district have contributed 42 percent of the money so far, according to a May 5 report to the local Board of Education by foundation executive director Linda Greenberg.

About 31 percent of SMMUSD families have donated to the campaign, while 21.3 percent of district employees have chipped in. Participation rates among SMMUSD staff include 65.9 percent for management, 29.4 percent for teachers and 9.3 percent for classified personnel, according to Greenberg's report.

SMMEF raised \$2.36 million in last year's fundraising cycle, which lasted 17 months so the foundation could

align its campaign with the school district calendar.

More than 60 donors have given \$5,000 or more towards this school year's annual fundraiser, raising a collective total of more than \$621,000. The so-called Superintendent's Circle has grown more than 40 percent in membership since last year's SMMEF campaign.

Corporate partners have contributed more than \$310,000 to the campaign, according to Greenberg's report, with an additional \$80,000 through in-kind donations and \$147,500 in pending gifts.

Rawson said the local business community has responded well to the foundation's strategy of allowing businesses that contribute a certain amount to be sponsors for all SMMEF events.

"We're very pleased with how the corporate community has stepped up," Rawson said. "Corporate giving is a very important part of being active in the community."

Greenberg's report was presented a few weeks after the inaugural SMMEF wine auction, which raised more than \$115,000. More than 400 people attended the April 17 fundraiser, which featured food and beverage tastings as well as live, silent and online auctions.

The event was successful, officials said, because it raised money while building connections in the community and giving officials a chance to educate donors about the programs funded by SMMEF.

"The generosity of our food and wine vendors, along with the commitment of our corporate partners, was extraordinary," Greenberg said. "We look forward to their continued partnership as we grow this event over the next several years."

Added Rawson: "People really enjoyed themselves. It was a stellar first-year event, and there's been a lot of buzz about it. There's no question that it's an event this community will have for years to come."

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