

## THE HEALDSBURG TRIBUNE &gt; NEWS

**HEF awards \$20k to local schools****By Nathan Wright**  
**Staff Writer**

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The Healdsburg Education Foundation recently awarded \$20,000 in mini grants to pay for programs and activities in Healdsburg and Alexander Valley public schools.

These grants pay for activities ranging from a trip to the Sonoma County Agricultural Fair for Healdsburg first graders to counseling materials on drug and alcohol issues at the junior high. In all Healdsburg schools garnered more than \$18,000 for 32 projects and Alexander Valley Elementary School received \$1,200.

"These mini grants offer enrichment opportunities we just couldn't afford otherwise, from technology to field trips," said HUSD superintendent Jeff Harding. "We're indebted to the community for supporting our schools."

Each year the education foundation fundraises to pay for the annual grants, rallying the community to make donations of any amount to help out the cash-strapped public schools. HEF then accepts applications from educators for enrichment programs and materials. These applications are reviewed by the school's principal, then the district's curriculum director Annie Millar and finally by a mini grant committee.

"As the state continues to deny adequate funding for our schools, the mini grant program restores some of the extras we have lost over the years and supports teachers in pursuing experiences for their students that would otherwise be unavailable," said Judy Velasquez, a member of the committee and school board member.

Healdsburg High School English teachers Justin Braider, Luz Garcia and Sarah Cranke used one of the grants to take 190 freshmen to see Steinbeck's classic play "Of Mice and Men" in October. Braider said his students said afterwards that seeing the actual play was a fun and valuable experience.

"It was just a fun experience doing something outside of the classroom," he said. "It certainly gave students a much better understanding of the play and a relevance they wouldn't have had otherwise. It was also a unifying experience."

One of the biggest contributors to this year's grants was the American Association of University Women, who donated \$5,800 raised through the Healdsburg Historic Homes Tour. Many businesses and families also donated through HEF's annual fund campaign, an effort they've already begun for next year's grants. "We send letters to all parents, staff, business leaders and past supporters," said Pamela Swan, HEF's executive director. "Any amount is really appreciated."

Swan outlined HEF's ongoing projects this week, beginning with the mini grants and continuing with three focus areas for 2009-2010. The foundation has pledged to raise \$100,000 for an enrichment program at both Healdsburg Elementary school campuses, programs that began this fall. These programs offer youngsters the opportunity to study with special teachers in a multitude of fun subjects including robotics, chess, gardening, gymnastics and creative writing. While students enjoy the enrichment classes their regular teacher has time to meet with fellow educators to collaborate and plan for future instruction.

HEF has also committed to pay for major renovations to the library at Healdsburg Junior High School. The Wendt family donated \$80,000 to the project earlier this fall and the foundation is hoping to raise even more to pay for new technology and a remodel.

For more information on the mini grant program, to donate to support student learning and activities, or to inquire about any HEF program, contact Swan at 433-1223 or email her at [pswan@hefschools.com](mailto:pswan@hefschools.com).

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