

Centennial foundation awards fund education enrichment

By James Boyle Correspondent | Posted: Tuesday, April 22, 2014 9:30 pm

A little luck can sometimes create an unforgettable experience in the classroom.

That's a lesson McDonald Elementary teacher Joe Pisacano re-learned a few weeks ago when he projected a live video feed of 400 trout eggs from a 55-gallon aquarium in his classroom to the white screen in front of 30 fifth-grade students. As he panned the camera across the tank, one of the eggs began to hatch.

"The kids exploded, they were so excited," said Pisacano. "It was a great moment."

It was also a moment that would not have been possible without the \$500 grant Pisacano receives each year from the Centennial Education Foundation. He joined fellow Centennial School District teachers, administrators, school board members and foundation board members at the CEF's annual awards breakfast at Ann's Choice in Warminster on Tuesday morning.

Since it formed in 1997, the CEF has handed out more than \$500,000 in grants to educators in the school district, providing supplemental funding to classroom projects that may otherwise not exist.

"These grants help create the experiences that add so much to the classroom, beyond the everyday curriculum," said Centennial Superintendent Joyce Mundy. "It is these programs that create that spark in the children and give them an idea of what they might want to do when they get older."

Founding board member and 1960 William Tennent graduate Ronald Schumann has remained with the CEF for 17 years and watched the fundraising efforts grow from run-of-the-mill car raffles to major attractions such as this year's Night with Ray Didinger, a special dinner that brought in 190 guests eager to interact with the Pro Football Hall of Fame sportswriter.

"There are no egos in the board meetings, which is why I have stayed on as long as I have," said Schumann. "Everybody is there for the same purpose, to help the children."

This year, the foundation introduced a summer enrichment program funded through the educational improvement tax credit program. Using more than \$55,000 in donations from community partners such as Hatboro Federal Savings, Quaint Oak Bank and Giant Food Stores, the program offers four-day classes in July and August on topics ranging from baby-sitting and public speaking to space exploration and Lego animation. Registration costs \$35 for each class and ends on May 16.

"We would not be able to offer a program like this without the Centennial Education Foundation," said Mundy. "It's amazing that we have seen the foundation's contributions triple in the past several years while we struggle to get funding from the state and federal budgets."

A partnership with the Burpee Foundation helped the CEF award more than \$10,000 to an environmental education program at Willow Dale Elementary that will teach students about issues like the impact of food sustainability, according to Principal Michael Donnelly. Other recipients benefiting from Tuesday's awards include a traveling history program, STEM classes, Character Counts assemblies, author programs, and theater and arts programs.

Pisacano has been using the funds for the past five years to annually purchase 400 trout eggs from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Students in his class and second-grade students in Megan Schumann's class monitor the eggs as they gestate through the school year, keeping an eye on water temperature and chemistry.

"It's a lesson on a cold-water ecosystem, which is the ecosystem in this area," said Pisacano. "The water has to stay chilled at 50 degrees and properly balanced. We start with 400 eggs and usually produce 100 finger-length trout. So the kids also get a lesson in survival of the fittest."

The Trout in the Classroom program finishes at the end of May when Pisacano and Schumann take the students to Tyler State Park, where they release the fish in the Neshaminy Creek.

"We are very pleased to award grants to programs that promote enriched activities for our students and to be a part of the EITC program," said Robert Phillips, president of the CEF. "For a student who starts out in our district in the elementary grades, we believe there is close to a 100 percent chance that along their path to graduation, they will be affected by our programs."