

Grants benefit students favorite nonprofits

By Christine Charnosky Correspondent | Posted: Saturday, June 7, 2014 6:00 am

A group of Bucks County students doled out \$35,000 to learn a lesson in philanthropy.

Students from Palisades, Quakertown, New Hope-Solebury, Centennial, Bensalem and Morrisville, and also the county's Intermediate Unit, determined how best to distribute \$5,000 given to each entity from the Norman Raab Foundation's board of directors.

Called "Philanthropy Today," the program was heralded in a ceremony Friday at the Intermediate Unit in Doylestown Township that explained how the money has helped 20 county-based nonprofits.

The Norman Raab Foundation designed the program to introduce students to charitable-giving.

This year marks the first of a 10-year commitment involving the Raab Foundation, school districts and the Intermediate Unit, said JoAnn Perotti, the IU's director of strategic services.

"We want to get all 13 school districts involved next year," Perotti said, adding that the Raab Foundation has pledged \$5,000 to each of the 13 Bucks County districts and the IU for the next nine years.

Stephen Raab's father, Norman, a leader in the garment industry with the Villager Clothing line, started the foundation in 1968.

Since Norman Raab's death in 2005, each year his descendants give away money to continue the organization's benevolent work, Stephen Raab said.

The six school districts and the county IU each distributed their \$5,000 share to organizations that help children, families, animals and the environment. This year's recipients include the Just for the Kids Foundation, an education foundation for the Bensalem schools; the Quakertown Food Pantry, Friends of the Delaware Canal and the Last Chance Ranch animal rescue.

"The kids were given funding and told they could make the decision about where to place the funding," Raab said.

"They had to discover the needs of the community, set a mission, find charitable organizations, investigate the organizations and decide where to give the money."

The student-led groups each sought the approval of the Raab Foundation board of directors.

"Some kids chose (organizations) we are funding or have funded," Raab said, adding that students also alerted the foundation to new nonprofits that could use the money.

"We brought this project forward to our board as a new idea," Norman Raab's granddaughter Sara McInery Raab told students, "and you vastly exceeded our expectations."

For its part, the Intermediate Unit chose Snipes Farm and Education Center in Falls as one of its beneficiaries.

From visits to Snipes, IU student Brandon Khemlani explained how the farm employs hydroponics, a soil-free plant-growing method that uses nutrient-rich solutions and water.

“What I found most interesting was that if we get hydroponics down,” said Khemlani, “we could grow normal plants in a desert.”

Kyle Gresh, a soon-to-be graduating senior from William Tennent High School, said his group chose Big Brother Big Sisters of Bucks County as a beneficiary because the organization needs money to find “bigs.”

“Imagine being in the second grade and you don’t have a family you need to get support,” said Gresh.

New Hope-Solebury students picked the teen suicide-prevention group the Will-to-Live Foundation of Georgia to receive \$2,500 because the agency has roots in the community.

At Friday’s program, Betsy Dockery spoke about her nephew Will Trautwein, who took his own life at the age of 15.

“It is tough for your age group. You have so many pressures that can affect you,” said Dockery, who thanked the students for their giving. “We know kids need help and support.”

Students from Morrisville High School distributed their funds between TODAY Inc., which offers behavioral services, and the Network of Victims Assistance, which provides short-term counseling for victims of crime and violence.

“What I see in this room is not tomorrow’s leaders, but today’s leaders,” Donna Foisy, prevention specialist for TODAY, said in her thank-you message to students.