

TEACHER'S UNCOMMON IDEA LEADS TO FLOOD OF DONATIONS

Virtual Benefactors Subsidize Class Projects

As you begin to work on your taxes this year, examining gifts and charitable deductions, consider one more for 2011: education. DonorsChoose.org is a non-profit organization focused on helping teachers get the materials they need into their classrooms. Using the site as an intermediary, teachers are able to submit requests for project ideas and supplies and then participating donors select the projects they would like to support. In Krum, Texas, second-grade teacher Marian Martin is taking advantage of the website and the generosity of others.

Named one of Oprah's "favorite things" in 2010, DonorsChoose.org has since gained mainstream attention, sparking incredible donations by corporations and individuals. Martin first learned about the website while reading an article in an educator's magazine two years ago.

"At that time I looked into the site but did not post any projects," said Martin. "Last year our school participated in Sonic's 'Limeades for Learning' campaign which funded projects voted on through DonorsChoose.org. That's when I decided to give the website a try and posted a request for digital cameras for student projects," she said.

Martin's try worked. Her school received three new digital cameras and a photo printer for students to print pictures from those cameras. Encouraged by the success of her campaigns, Martin decided to keep going. She has since had three more projects funded, including a second Sonic-funded project, resulting in the donation of two more digital cameras used for educational scavenger hunts, science discovery learning, and even determining math patterns.

Another request for a Flip video camera was financed by anonymous donors. The camera has allowed Martin's class to film a morning show, which is now viewed by the entire campus during their morning assembly. The students write scripts, make cue cards, study basic video production, and film each other.

"It is wonderful as an instructor to be able to guide them and then sit back as an observer in my students' world of learning," says Martin.

UPS—along with a few anonymous supporters—funded the most recent application for recycling materials to help encourage school-wide green behavior. As a result, the students have been gifted recycling tubs, a utility cart, and packing materials to collect and ship recycling items. The newly formed "Dyer Bobcat Brigade" collects recycled materials from the bins each Friday afternoon before counting them and prepping them for shipping.

Martin says that the biggest benefit of receiving the gifts is the ability to have those tools available in the classroom every day.

"Although we have access to a limited supply of similar materials as a campus, when you have to schedule a check-out, determine availability, and remember to go get it, it increases the likelihood that

the use will be avoided entirely,” says Martin. “As an advocate for technology use in the classroom, I am excited to put the new equipment to work and give my students an opportunity to be even more technologically savvy in the coming world.”

Although Martin’s efforts have been met with tremendous success, the projects don’t always get funded. Each submission has a limited window of opportunity to catch a sponsor’s eye before it is retired from the site. Following the fulfillment of a classroom request, each recipient is required (and happy) to submit a closing thank-you package for the donations before a new appeal can be made.

“I am ecstatic about receiving these items for my class and school,” says Martin. “As an educator, I am humbled by the generosity of others to fund the educational projects of teachers that might not be possible with normal funding.”

Martin’s latest grant submission is titled “Bobcats Love Lego Learning” and focuses on integrating the popular building materials into classroom lessons. She plans to launch a secondary crusade in the near future which will rely on digital books to assist struggling readers. You can view her site at www.donorschoose.org/marian.martin.