

IMPACT! Funding Innovation in Education

CSI: Michigan City. Elementary school Olympics. Math Poetry. The world's largest search word puzzle. The projects are so interesting, it's almost enough to make you wish you were back in grade school! They are some of the hundreds of innovative learning projects created by teachers in Michigan City that have been funded by the Michigan City Education Foundation (MCEF).



Andre Clay of Lake Hills Elementary used an MCEF grant and taught 100 students the game of chess to improve their critical thinking skills.

The Foundation began in 1994 when Mary Lou Linnen, June and Burton "Bud" Ruby, and the Michigan City Chamber of Commerce teamed up to endow a fund that would distribute small grants (up to \$350) "for teachers to develop and implement creative programs in the classroom in grades K-8." MCEF was modeled after the Chicago Foundation for Education and reaches both public and parochial schools.

"Bud was involved with the Unity Foundation, which was looking to build education endowments, and we wanted to do this as an endowment," Mary Lou remembered. Since then, thousands of students have eagerly discovered these new paths to learning. Amy Wojosinski, who earned 11 grants said, "These grants do help. They provide students of all abilities at all levels with a little more motivation.

The projects make them want to learn and be at school."

Innovation is a powerful tool in education. "Children learn in different ways," Mary Lou said. "A project may prompt a child to learn something they might not learn in their regular lesson." Mandy Sherrick, one of the teachers involved in the Word Search project, said, "Our kids are so technologically savvy right now, we have to find ways to make learning relevant. If kids don't see the connection between their lives and what we're teaching them, we've lost them." Teachers now have tools they wouldn't have otherwise.

Since it started, MCEF has made more than \$126,000 in grants and reached thousands of students. The projects have helped with academic achievement, behavior and attendance by making school more relevant and at the same time. . .fun!

A teacher may recycle materials year after year or pass it on to other teachers. One project, originally devised for students with learning difficulties, was expanded to all. Some projects involve the entire school. The Word Search project involved the sixth, seventh and eighth grade of three schools. The number of students impacted grows exponentially beyond the original grant.

Mary Lou and volunteers visit the classrooms every year to see the results in person. Amy said, "The students love to show off their work." Their audience is certainly receptive. Mary Lou said, "It's really fun. That's what makes it all worthwhile."

Adam Goebel helps Shannon Galloway describe her project that challenged Elston Middle School students using Shakespeare's classics.



A Lesson in Generosity

Make an impact on the young learners of our community with a contribution to the Michigan City Education Foundation or other Unity education funds. Teachers, you're invited to try your hand and submit an application for a new idea!

