

TC Holiday Fund’s CSA, EPAK keep feet warm, curricula flowing



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Photo Elliott Burr/Town Crier

This year’s Holiday Fund may allow Community Service Agency to restore their shoe voucher program and help needy kids put shoes on their feet.

something a little more footsy.

“We’re not getting shoe vouchers anymore,” said Elba Landaverde, emergency assistance program director. “We used to get them from the Assistance League of Los Altos, but they’re not generating as much revenue anymore (due to decreasing costume rentals).” Landaverde said they had to cut the program last March, although the need remains.

CSA used to be able to issue families a \$20 per person voucher valid at Payless Shoe Source on Grant Road in Mountain View.

“With five children, that’s \$100” toward several pairs of shoes,” Landaverde said. She would like to start up the program again and include the Payless store in San Antonio Center because of its more “central location.”

To qualify for a shoe voucher, one must be a Mountain View, Los Altos or Los

The Town Crier Holiday Fund annually collects and disburses financial donations to area non-profit organizations that benefit those in need. In the following article, we profile two of this year’s 15 beneficiaries, Community Services Agency Helping Kids and East Palo Alto Kids Foundation.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY HELPING KIDS

The Community Services Agency of Mountain View Los Altos offers an array of support for families in the area, ranging from food services to assisting in finding dental care, but this year it’s in need of

Altos Hills resident, live in the low-income demographic and young people must be K-12 students. Landaverde said a majority of CSA's clientele is Latino.

If the total shoe purchase exceeds the voucher, families are encouraged to pay the difference.

"One gentleman told me, 'But I only have \$1 to my name,'" Landaverde said. "We try to encourage fiscal responsibility so there's a sense of ownership. ... Like you can buy shoes that last all year long so you don't have to buy them as often or I always tell people to look for the sales.

"We used to get maybe five to eight people requesting shoe vouchers each week," Landaverde said. But now, she said, they don't have any vouchers for families.

She said she often gets to know families very well, and she knows how needy they are.

"It's really hard to turn people away," she said. "Something like shoes might not seem like a big deal to most people, but to them it is."

CSA receives its funds from individual donors, foundation grants and corporate sponsors.

For more information, visit www.csacares.org or call 968-0836.

EAST PALO ALTO KIDS FOUNDATION

Fundraising on the west side of Highway 101 isn't a cakewalk but Laura Roberts, president of the board of directors for the East Palo Alto Kids Foundation (EPAK), said the real void lies in the east.

"There's a huge need on the other side of the freeway," Roberts said of the sometimes-lackluster classroom scene in East Palo Alto. "There's already a large amount of fundraising everywhere (in the local school districts) whether they need it or not."

Since 1993, EPAK has been a "community-based, all volunteer organization whose mission is to promote educational opportunities and academic success for students in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park," reads EPAK's mission statement. One way it's been able to weather so much of the economic turmoil is their low overhead – it's 100 percent volunteer.

Roberts said, however, it's not a foundation established to grant money for food, clothing or furniture. While those are important, it's EPAK's support of the school curriculum and enrichment programs that really make a difference.

Awarding grants, not to exceed \$500, directly to teachers (since, Roberts said, "the teachers know best their needs") is where it counts, according to EPAK members.

"The way we came up with \$500 was because that's what it costs to charter a bus," Roberts said. "In Los Altos and Mountain View, when kids want to go on a field trip, the parents just write a check. But the only way the kids can go on field trips (in many East Palo Alto schools) is through grants."

EPAK Board of Directors member Julie Mahowald said classes often go to spots like the Exploratorium in San Francisco, Coyote Point Museum in San Mateo and the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Roberts said EPAK receives thank you letters from many of the students who have benefited from the foundation's grants. When asked to see a letter, Roberts said, "Which box would you like?"

To receive an EPAK grant, a teacher must be a fully credentialed full-time instructor. Roberts said they've become stricter about grants because of the number of applications (it had 380 applicants during the 08-09 school year, and accepted 360).

Teachers submit receipts from their projects to allow EPAK to track the funding and ensure that it supports the requested application.

"The teachers are always so delighted," Mahowald said. "It goes beyond just money. It shows we're doing something important for the world. It's pretty awesome."

For more information, call 996-4754 or visit www.epak.org.

Next week, the Town Crier will profile Holiday Fund recipients Help One Child, Partners for New Generations and Hidden Villa. To donate to the Holiday Fund, make checks payable to "Town Crier Holiday Fund" and send to 138 Main St., Los Altos 94022. For more information, visit www.latcholidayfund.org.

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