

February 15, 2007

BOCDA Gala showcases Park students' achievements in the arts

By Debra Bowers, Ph., D., Superintendent of Schools

We are a community that wraps itself around its youth. Some time ago, one of our teachers used this phrase to describe St. Louis Park. It resonated with me then, and it rings true today as St. Louis Park is honored for the second-consecutive time as one of the nation's 100 Best Communities for Young People by America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth. America's Promise, founded by Ret. Gen. Colin Powell, recognizes communities that show a commitment to providing a healthy, safe, and caring environment for children and young people.

One of the ways St. Louis Park demonstrates its commitment to youth is through the work of the St. Louis Park Public Schools Foundation (SLPPSF). The organization was founded by a group of caring community members who are dedicated to supporting student achievement and enhancing school district programming in times of tight budget.

“I have benefited by public education,” said Foundation board member Paul Jennings. “My role on the board gives me the chance to give back to the community and exercise my leadership abilities.”

The SLPPSF, supported mostly by private donations, has awarded more than \$75,000 in direct school grants over the past three years. Foundation grants focus on the areas of reading, arts, and transition programs such as the award-winning ninth-grade transition program and junior high drama productions. In 2005, it awarded \$35,000 to projects identified by teachers throughout the district.

The SLPPSF is preparing for its biggest fundraising event of the year, the Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Drama and Arts (BOCDA) Gala from 6:30-9 p.m. on Saturday, February 24 at the St. Louis Park Senior High auditorium, 6425 West 33rd Street, St. Louis Park.

In the spirit of Children First, this event involves students on every level. The evening's entertainment showcases student achievement in the arts, beginning with an art gallery exhibit of pastels, acrylics, photos and pottery. Band, orchestra and chorus performances follow. A professional dance group, Universal Dance Destiny, will join students in performing at the BOCDA Gala. A dessert reception concludes the festivities.

In coordinating the event, Foundation board members sought a dance group that was not only willing to perform, but also offer an educational opportunity to our students. They found that match in Edna Stevens Talton, Universal Dance Destiny's director. Edna is a professional dancer and choreographer from Liberia, Africa. She specializes in Hip Hop, Reggae, Dancehall, Breakdance, and African dances. Edna has been working with St. Louis Park High School students who will perform with the group at the Gala.

Tickets are \$15 for one, \$25 for two, \$40 for three, and \$50 for four. For more information, or to purchase tickets, call Elaine Levy, 952-922-9062 or log onto www.slppsf.org.

On behalf of all the staff and students of St. Louis Park Public Schools, I'd like to thank the members of the SLPPSF for their tremendous support of public education and for bringing students and community members together at the BOCDA Gala to celebrate achievements and raise funds to support future endeavors. If you would like to join the SLPPSF board, contact Peter Levy, 952-922-9062.

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