



Fort Foundation Focus

by Fred A. Rose, Volunteer Publicist

www.fortfoundation.org

This column has normally elaborated on the direct benefits that the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation has on the quality of life in our community, or on the wise and efficient way in which the Foundation administers the funds entrusted to its care. But the Foundation is only one of many organizations and efforts that contribute immeasurably to the outstanding quality of life that we enjoy in Fort. I would like to focus this column on one such effort that has grown to become a real contributor to the community.

In 1990 the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce launched a leadership development program, *Project Lead*. The purpose of that effort is to coach and encourage young people in local business about how to contribute to the community outside of their business efforts. Each year, Chamber members are encouraged to nominate young, up-and-coming professionals for the program, and of course, the businesses allow the participants to take time off from work to participate.

In addition, the same Chamber members are asked to provide instructors from the ranks of their senior management. Many members have generously supplied talented executives/professionals to provide the coaching, including quite a number of local CEOs. The group is headed by a "facilitator," a local leader who guides the whole process. This volunteer commits a major amount of his or her time to provide leadership to the program. This past year the facilitator was Dr. Jim Fitzpatrick, Superintendent of the Fort Schools. Actually he has filled this role for three years. This fall, Class XX (20 years!), will be lead by Tony Bolz, principal at Barrie School.

In addition to the lectures, discussions, tours, and insights contributed by the coaches, each class is encouraged to identify, plan, and execute a project to benefit the community. The first several years, the projects undertaken were self-contained, that is, they were primarily research projects which would lead the way for more visible projects that later classes would undertake.

For example, from 1990 through 1992, the projects involved efforts like establishing a drugs-in-the-workplace-task-force, an assessment of transportation needs in the city, an assessment of child care needs, a literacy project, and a feasibility study of restrooms at Lorman Bicentennial Park. They also did a few visible, but inexpensive projects like production of a brochure of resources for kids, and city bins for recycling.

Later, as Project Lead became more established, and the legacy and lessons of the early classes were assessed by the Chamber sponsors, the projects became more visible, and, of course, more expensive. In many, if not all cases, the Project

Lead class itself raised a significant portion of the funds required. But, as you might have guessed, the Community Foundation was willingly tapped for many of them.

I think you might be surprised at the range of things you see around town every day that were conceptualized by Project Lead classes. The majority of them were funded in part by the Foundation. The following list is a partial one.

- the split rail fence around the Panther Intaglio on Hwy 106 West
- brought the first Buckskinners Rendezvous to Fort
- the outdoor lighted map of the city on the front of the Chamber Office Building
- landscaping for the Fort Atkinson welcome signs at each end of the Hwy 26 bypass
- the water fountain on the Bike Trail near the Waste Water Treatment plant
- the Jones Park lighted event sign and historic walkway
- construction of Dorothy Carnes Park pathways
- the Welcome Sign at the Armory
- sidewalk plaques for the Chamber walking tour and the restoration of the plaque on the marker at the location of the original Fort
- extra railings on the River Walk
- digitization of archived photos/slides at the Hoard Museum
- mileage markers on the Bike Trail
- the trail signs at Mush-Ko-Se-Day Park
- lights for the Holiday Tree on the River Walk
- playground equipment at Ralph Park

Quite an impressive list! And Project Lead does other projects, specific to immediate needs of the community, that do not require significant funding. Those projects, and the people that drive and guide Project Lead are another great asset to Fort.

Everyone in the community can personally support Project Lead projects and many other community projects by becoming a part of the donor base of the Foundation. A few citizens make major donations, but all of us can have an impact by adding a little something to the Foundation each year. Please consider making a small annual gift. As all of us know, small, but repeated gifts from a large number of donors add up to major projects.

Anyone needing more information, or who would like to make a donation to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation, is asked to contact Helen Rose, Program Administrator, at 920-563-3210 (office), 920-563-4926 (home), or visit the Foundation's Web site at www.fortfoundation.org.