



Fort Foundation Focus

By Jennifer Mertens, volunteer publicist

School is almost over and the summer season approaching. But, for some students pursuing advanced education, summer is the time for securing funds to make it through one more college semester. Or, for high school seniors graduating, it's the time to save money and prepare for new challenges of college. The Fort Atkinson Community Foundation has been offering scholarships to local students for the past twenty years. This year will be not unlike the others, but as funds to the Foundation continue to grow, so do the opportunities available to dedicated and ambitious students.

In 2003, 44 Fort Atkinson area students were awarded a total of \$186,200 in scholarships from the Foundation's funds for both undergraduate and advanced studies. The majority of the scholarship funds are endowed, signifying that only the earnings and appreciation are used, allowing the fund to last in perpetuity. The scholarship funds account for approximately 19 percent of the Foundation's assets, or over \$3 million. In 2004, approximately \$4,000 in additional funds will be awarded in support of continuing education.

Amy Oakley, acting Director of Administration for the School District of Fort Atkinson, knows firsthand the difference this money can make during those educational years. "When I got that first scholarship for \$1,500 I felt like I had won the lottery," she says. "I was so thrilled."

Oakley was the recipient of three Rutledge Graduate Scholarships while attending graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and UW-Madison. She graduated from Whitewater in 2002 with a masters in Educational Leadership and will graduate in Spring 2004 from Madison with her state licensure in Administration.

Oakley and her husband decided to pursue advance degrees simultaneously and these scholarships provided the ability for them to do that. "My husband was in school half-time," she says. "I was in school half-time. The amount of money we would have needed to incur in loans was extraordinary. If I wouldn't have had the opportunity to apply for a scholarship like this, it would have been a huge financial consideration for us and I'm not sure we could have done it at the same time." And, while in school, Oakley was working full-time as a teacher and also had a second job tutoring homebound children.

When deciding where to begin her full-time teaching career, this Fort native Oakley says her hometown was where she wanted to be. "Fort Atkinson is a community that is extremely dedicated to its school system and takes a lot of pride in every aspect of it, whether from sports or extracurricular activities, music or academics," she boasts. "There's just an overwhelmingly high level of support on the part of parents, community members and leaders. It's unusual."

While doing field study in Milwaukee, Oakley said she realized the assets Fort Atkinson's School District offered, and it was something she wanted to be a part of. After graduation from Mount Mary College, she took a job as a Middle School Language Arts teacher in Fort Atkinson. It was at that time she decided to pursue a masters degree. "Now, four years later and I'm done," she says. "The scholarships made it possible for my husband to go to school and for us to do it at the same time. I think that it's just so powerful."

\$10,000 is available this year for Rutledge Graduate Scholarships, as Oakley received in 2000, 2002 and 2003. The

Rutledge Scholarship Fund was accepted as part of the Foundation's endowments in November, 1996 from the Ralph & Clara Rutledge Trust. These scholarships are designated for students pursuing advanced graduate and professional education and are awarded based on academic excellence, good citizenship and both school and community involvement.

One of the major scholarships being awarded to high school and college or graduate students include the Buell Merit, Honor and Graduate Scholarships. Accepted in 1982, these scholarships are intended to be the "capstone" of the local scholarships. They are based on merit and not financial need and awarded to graduating seniors of Fort Atkinson High School. In 2004, two Merit Scholarships will be awarded at \$20,000 each, an undetermined number of \$1,500 awards and \$30,000 is available for the Graduate Scholarship.

Also available for students are the Batterman Family Foundation Scholarships, five at \$3,000 each, renewable three times and offered to graduating seniors of Fort Atkinson High School. The student must have a GPA of 3.0 or greater and be among the top 20 graduating students. Another stipulation is that student must have demonstrated financial need and be good in character, as demonstrated through recommendation letters.

The Juanita Schreiner Scholarship, which will have \$15,000 available this year, was awarded to Dr. Kirsten (Witzke) Larson while she completed her medical training at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, Michigan. Larson currently practices family medicine at the Urgent Care Department of Dean Riverview Clinic in Janesville, Wisconsin. With a \$40,000 a year tuition, Larson says the \$3,000 scholarship helped her purchase labcoats, books. "It was \$3,000 of my rather substantial loans that I don't have now, thankfully," she says. "I think it's wonderful that they offer scholarships to graduate students." This scholarship is available to a Fort High School graduate pursuing a degree in nursing medicine, voice or organ at a university.

Another medical scholarship was founded by Spacesaver Corp. in honor of Ronald Staller and his parents, Maurice and Clara Staller. To be eligible for this scholarship, students must enroll in a university in Wisconsin and prepare for a career in the medical field.

A variety of other scholarships are available including the Sidney H. Weidmann, which has \$7,500 available this year. The selection committee for this award includes a member of Dr. Weidemann's family, the high school principal and a Foundation director.

For the athletic talents, a Dr. James Russell Athletic Scholarship is offered to a graduating senior who has participated in two or more sports and has a minimum 3.0 GPA. In 2004, this scholarship will be for \$3,000.

An AAUW Second Chance Grant is a \$500 annual award for a woman continuing a vocational/technical school program after being out of an educational arena for more than one year. This student's home must be in Fort Atkinson and selection is based on financial need, family circumstances, realistic goals and determination in achieving them. In 2003, \$3,000 was available for these awards the same will be this year.

Also available for women residing in Fort Atkinson and returning to school is the Jane Shaw Knox Adopt-A-Student Scholarship. This scholarship is available for up to \$1,000 per

year, renewable for five years or until a degree is obtained.

For education majors, an Eileen Harrison Education Scholarship is awarded by the Foundation each year. The Jason Dahnert Memorial Scholarship is granted to students attending college or graduate school with an engineering emphasis. Another engineering scholarship is the Jerome Hake Scholarship, which was established by Lloyd Hake in memory of his brother. It is offered to students graduating from Fort High School, who are in the top third of their class and plan to attend a four-year college. Also established by Lloyd Hake, this time in memory of his parents, is the Ben and Ada Hake Scholarship. This is an agricultural award given to a Fort High School graduate in the top third of their class and will be attending a four-year college or two-year technical program.

“We felt that to have a Fort Atkinson organization that was willing to invest in somebody, to say ‘We’ll invest in you and trust that the skills you learn will pay back into our community,’

is huge,” says Oakley.

2004 is just another year in the history books, but to the citizens, students and educators in Fort Atkinson, it may be worth remembering. A scholarship enhances community growth and education. “Do I feel like I want to do community activities?” says Oakley. “Absolutely.” For a native Fort Atkinson girl, this is the only place she will ever call home.

Inquiries regarding or donations to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation can be mailed to 244 N. Main St., Fort Atkinson, WI 53538. Contact also can be made either by phone, (920) 563-3210; or email, fact@idcnet.com.

Visit the Foundation’s Web site at www.fortfoundation.org for more information and look for continuing coverage of the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation’s happenings in future columns in the Daily Jefferson County Union.