

Pasco Education Foundation Gives Grants

MONEY FUNDS VARIETY OF PROJECTS FOR STUDENTS

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From maintaining a butterfly garden to making quilts for an area hospice or staging dramatic skits based on literature, Pasco County students will be taking creative approaches to learning, thanks to grants from the Pasco Education Foundation.

The foundation awarded nearly 140 creative teaching grants of \$300 in Pasco last month. The money pays for classroom projects intended to enhance school programs through innovation.

Kerri Rulison, a science teacher at Hudson Middle School, was awarded a grant for her water conservation and recycling project. One hundred and nineteen students are involved in the project, which started with students cultivating a butterfly garden stocked with milkweeds, pintas, chocolate mint and other plants.

Students are responsible for maintaining the garden, started with money and materials donated by the children and their parents.

In the next phase of the project, students will build rain barrels to help nourish their garden.

"When you hook up a rain barrel to a gutter, it catches the rain from the roof that can be used to water the garden," said Rulison, who administers the project with fellow science teacher Karin Bialkoski.

The third phase involves buying a recycling container, so students can



Tribune photo by ANDY JONES

Kerri Rulison, a teacher at Hudson Middle School, and several other Pasco teachers and schools are getting grants for educational projects.

recycle cans and bottles at school.

"This project will teach students to take more pride in the earth, to learn about ways they can preserve natural resources and help out," said Rulison.

Other teachers are getting creative, too.

Trinity Elementary's Tanya Getty earned a creative teaching grant for the Geometry Quilts project she is planning with fellow math teachers Connie Sarakun, Amy Bland, Ellen Sigmon and Jeanne Brant.

"We are planning on teaching geometry through making quilts, patterned from geometric shapes," she said.

The project also will teach students about community service.

"We plan to donate the quilts to an

area hospice, as some of our staff members have families that have been influenced by hospice," Getty said.

A grant also will help fund the Learning to Be a Survivor peer counseling class at the F.K. Marchman Technical Education Center in New Port Richey.

The program uses "A Child Called It," Dave Pelzer's classic story about life as an abused child, to teach students counseling and communication skills.

"The kids are enthralled by this book. They can't put it down," said teacher Catherine Quigley. "It sparks a love for reading to them and teaches kids that they can't judge a book by its cover — to be understanding of

kids in their class who might not fit in."

To accommodate all 45 of her students, Quigley had to make copies of the book or have students share. Her grant will let her purchase the books she needs, including several other titles.

"These books teach kids that, no matter how tough their home lives might be, they're not as bad as they could have been," she said. "They teach kids to understand each other better and appreciate what they have."

With dollars so tight in schools these days, the creative teaching grants are critical in allowing teachers to pursue innovative projects, recipients said.

"It's incredible what the Pasco Education Foundation does for teachers," said Rulison. "These grants make it possible for us to do projects we couldn't do otherwise."

Rhonda Leslie at Sunlake High School in Land O' Lakes was awarded a creative teaching grant for her Through Deaf Eyes project. A teacher of American Sign Language, Leslie plans to use the grant to purchase the "Through Deaf Eyes" film and related teaching materials.

"These materials will teach them not just language but the rich history and culture surrounding sign language," she said.

Leslie said she hopes the project will teach students why it's important to treat the hearing-impaired with respect.

"They've gone through their time of oppression and growth, like anyone else," she said.