

The Education Foundation of Martin County raising money for schools

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Originally published 01:00 a.m., September 2, 2009

Updated 06:18 p.m., September 2, 2009

MARTIN COUNTY — Lisa Rhodes just started a race to raise about \$20,000 for Martin County schools, and she has two weeks to win the grand prize in matching funds.

The executive director of The Education Foundation of Martin County hopes to raise the money by Sept. 14, the deadline to submit proposals for a matching grant offered by the state.

"We're challenging the community, and we're asking for their help," Rhodes said.

In the past, the foundation has used its money and the matching grant to fund everything from a hydroponic garden to faux archaeological digs.

The nonprofit Education Foundation started raising money Aug. 26, collecting pledges of \$4,000, Rhodes said. The foundation distributes its money in Ed McMahon-style giveaways complete with giant checks, as soon as the money is released by the state.

The state money is given to the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, which releases it to the about 60 organizations supporting school districts.

Instructors are currently writing and submitting grants. The foundation accepts grants for up to \$500 for individual projects and up to \$1,500 for group or larger projects.

Rhodes said local donors have contributed less money to Education Foundation fundraisers recently, but the foundation's donor pool has grown. She said she's anticipating less donations in the current campaign, but she hopes more donors will pop up to make up for reduced funds.

"I'm an optimist," Rhodes said. "I try not to worry about it too much."

Debra Alessandra, a math teacher at Spectrum Junior-Senior High School in East Stuart, said money procured by the Education Foundation allowed her to teach real-life math skills to her students as they started a hydroponic garden. The teacher used the \$800 grant to purchase a start-up kit, fertilizer and seeds.

"I could have never done it without the grant," Alessandra said.

Alessandra said the project helped her students learn about measurements, percentages and cost analysis.

