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Fundraising campaign kicks off for Saranac Promise scholarship program

A committee made up from leaders in the Saranac community met Wednesday evening to discuss the beginning of the Saranac Promise fundraising campaign.



PHOTO / METRO

The committee has set a fundraising goal for \$2 million and hopes to reach the goal by next year. The Saranac Promise scholarship program will assist graduates in pursuing education beyond high school.

A committee made up from leaders in the Saranac community met Wednesday evening to discuss the beginning of the Saranac Promise fundraising campaign.

The Saranac Promise is a program that is being put into place to make the possibility of going to college a reality for Saranac students. According to Maury Geiger, superintendent of Saranac Community Schools, the implementation of this initiative will shed a positive light on the community.

“The most positive thing for me is number one, we want kids in our high school to think that everybody can go to college and everybody has a chance for post-secondary education,” Geiger said. “We also want to make it affordable and feasible for them to go. We also want to make our community a place where they want to come back and stay once they’ve gone off to college and earned their degree.”

The idea behind the Saranac Promise is to provide financial assistance to graduates of Saranac Community Schools who want to go on to study at a college or partake in vocational training.

The plan was first started in the fall of 2013 and by the spring of 2014, over \$50,000 had been raised. Geiger said the organization has established an endowment with the Grand Rapids Community Foundation as an additional means to fundraise.

“It allows us to be apart of a larger organization,” Geiger said. “As we get more money, we can put that into the endowment, so that allows us to work with another group of investors or people that are interested who want to support the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.”

To date, the committee has raised approximately \$750,000, and the goal is to raise \$2 million over the next year to support the graduates of the district. The committee met with representatives of the Upjohn Institute, which aided in starting the Kalamazoo Promise program, and found it will take approximately \$9 million to sustain the scholarship program.

According to information provided by the committee, to be eligible for a Saranac Promise scholarship a student must be enrolled for one or more years and graduate from Saranac High School. The maximum annual amount of the scholarship will be pro-rated based on the number of years the student is enrolled.

The Saranac Promise is going to be phased into the system over a three year period. Phase one started in June of 2014 and included the promotion of the existing scholarships available at the school. Phase two is set to kick off in June of 2016, which will allow for a graduating student to receive up to \$1,000 if attending a Michigan college, university, or vocational school.

“We want to have implementation for our graduates of 2016,” Geiger said. “We want to have funds set aside for them so they can get a certain amount of money.”

During phase three, the student can receive \$4,000 or full tuition and fee payment per year of college for up to five years.

The money can be used to cover tuition and other mandatory fees not covered by federal or state grant sources, according to the committee’s information.

The Saranac Promise committee is made up from 13 cabinet members from the Saranac community, as well as the three cabinet chairs, Bruce Chadwick, Jim McCarty and Virgil Biggs; who are all graduates of Saranac Community Schools.

The committee will hold monthly meetings to discuss further fundraising initiatives to meet the \$2 million goal.

For more information or to donate to the cause, visit www.saranac.k12.mi.us or contact the district at 616-642-1400.

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