

Credit union spearheads teacher grants

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By ARLA SHEPHARD
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Like many parents with school-aged children, Susanna Samuelson has become acutely aware of the struggles facing classroom teachers today.

"I have two children in the Shelton School District and I have two very good friends that are teachers," said Samuelson, business development officer at Our Community Credit Union in Shelton. "I know they spend out of pocket on school supplies."

Samuelson decided to do something about it, and her efforts have culminated in a new educational grant program that will offer teachers the chance to fund materials or programs that will enhance students' learning experience.

The new program is a partnership between Our Community Credit Union, Green Diamond Resource Co., Shelton Dental Center, Elma Family Dental, Simpson Lumber Co. and Vaughan Chopper Pumps in Elma.

The grants will be offered to all Mason County K-12 school teachers, as well as those in the Elma School District in east Grays Harbor county.

"We support our schools and know how much help they need," said Daris Devaney, vice president of marketing for Our Community Credit Union. "Susanna presented us with a great opportunity to give back to our schools in all of Mason County and east Grays Harbor."

The program comes on the heels of another educational program that Our Community Credit Union and Green Diamond piloted last year at Olympic Middle School — teachers had the opportunity to put their names in a twice-a-year drawing for \$100 to use for school supplies.

"That's where the idea spring," Samuelson said. "The teachers were so appreciative. We saw that there was a need. It went so well."

Samuelson approached her dentist, Katherine Ketcher of Shelton Dental Center and Elma Family Dental, with the idea to do something more for teachers in their



PHOTO BY ARLA SHEPHARD

From left, Terri Roberts of Simpson Lumber Co. and Our Community Credit Union's Susanna Samuelson, business development officer, and Daris Devaney, vice president of marketing, are working with representatives from Green Diamond Resource Co. and Shelton Dental Center to offer educational grants to K-12 teachers in Mason County.

community.

"Just from sitting in her dentist chair and seeing her around the community, I knew she was passionate about education," Samuelson said. "We wanted to partner within our credit union family to pool our money and leverage that to provide a greater impact for the schools. Dr. Ketcher jumped right on it."

The credit union decided to limit the number of businesses involved this year to members of the Our Community Credit Union "family," or businesses that have close ties to the credit union, Samuelson said.

Simpson Lumber Co. formed Our Community Credit Union in 1941, and Green Diamond shares the same investors and family history as Simpson. Vaughan Chopper Pumps, Shelton Dental Center and Elma Family Dental also work closely with the credit union.

Terri Roberts, support systems administrator for Simpson Lumber, said the company was thrilled to work with the credit union on the educational grant program.

"I thought it was another great opportunity for Simpson to help the community and our future," Roberts said. "During the economic downturn in 2008, Simpson offered to buy the school supplies for all of its employees' children. I was amazed with how expensive school supplies are. This is another opportunity to give back."

The deadline to apply for an ed-

ucational grant is Dec. 31, and will be awarded based on their impact on students, Samuelson said.

The program partners plan to award the grants in January to be used during this school year.

"One of our main missions was to make this as easy as possible on teachers because they have a lot more nowadays to deal with than previous years," Samuelson said. "It's a simple, one-page application that requires a signature from their principal."

The application grant team has already received a couple applications from teachers, including requests for a reading program and equipment for special needs students.

The number of grants awarded will be determined by the number of teachers who apply and how much they ask for, Devaney said.

"We have a generous amount to spread," she said. "We are so lucky to have partners that are so community minded. We're just really excited to offer this program to our communities."

Educational grant applications can be found at www.ourcu.com/community-partners-education-grant or www.sheltondental-center.com/OCCUappl.htm

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