Setting Kids Up for Success: the Thompson Education Foundation
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By Hannah Fields | Photos by Jeanette Fellows Photography

Since 1989, Thompson Education Foundation (TEF) has been focused on student educational experiences and success. The foundation provides funding for over 70 programs, activities, and scholarships as the support partner for Thompson School District (TSD), serving students in Loveland, Berthoud, south Fort Collins and outlying communities.

TEF’s mission is exceptional educational experiences for students and staff of Thompson School District. This mission helps guide TEF to provide opportunities for student engagement and success. Often serving as a bridge between the community and the district, TEF strives to be the community’s best answer to support student opportunities in TSD.

“It’s a mission that’s very necessary”, explains TEF Executive Director, Kim Akeley-Charron. “Education foundations are an increasingly significant source of support for school districts in Colorado and around the country. TEF helps fill funding gaps and remove barriers to educational opportunities and activities for TSD students.”

For her, the impact is visceral. “I can see the difference TEF makes for students through our programs, whether it is watching a student enjoy a hike for the first time on a field trip to Bobcat Ridge or a high school senior receiving a scholarship that helps make their higher education dreams a reality.”

And the collaboration between TEF and TSD is a key part of making this possible. In fact, it’s one of Kim’s favorite things about her job! “I am deeply honored to work alongside TSD teachers and staff and am humbled by their dedication, knowledge and innovation. Each day brings new challenges and they meet every one so that their students can thrive.”

Before joining TEF, she worked as the cultural events coordinator for the Loveland Museum and Rialto Theater organizing events like the Foote Lagoon concert series and Rialto theater performances. For her, the best part of her role with TEF is the variety. “Our team makes every day fun! Plus every day is different and brings a new challenge. It’s the nature of public education to be cyclical and as a partner, our schedules and work load closely match with the district’s.”

TEF has a small team made up of three dedicated people, Kim, Lesa, and Eowyn.
Kim has been serving as the Executive Director since 2012, but she’s had a passion for nonprofits and education for even longer. Kim graduated from the University of Maine, where she worked for the university’s alumni association. She credits this experience with jump starting her career in the nonprofit sector. She and her husband Eric moved to Colorado in 1992, living first in Boulder and Denver before moving to Loveland in 2001. Says Kim, “we were searching for a place that would provide a sense of community for our young family but still provide lots of opportunity for our kids to learn and grow.” And they certainly found that in Loveland and Thompson School District.

In a similar journey, Lesa, originally from Seattle, has lived in Loveland with her husband, Matt, since 2006. The couple are avid runners who love the various trails in the Loveland area. Lesa and Matt have two young sons who are just starting their TSD journey!

The final member of the team, Eowyn, is also the newest. A Wyoming transplant, Eowyn has over 10 years of experience in the service industry and is serving as the team’s Administrative Assistant as of February 2023.

With such a small team, community involvement is a must to provide the best service to local kids. When asked what community members can do, Kim said “Get involved with our schools. There are volunteer opportunities at all levels of engagement but it can be as simple as watching a board meeting or reading updates on the district’s website or in the media.”

She adds, “Even if you don’t currently have students enrolled in TSD, the school district is a major resource for Loveland and Berthoud and as you learn more about it, I know you will be as amazed as I am at the inspiration and innovation that takes place in our schools each day.”

And there are even specific fundraisers out there for those who don’t have time to volunteer but still want to give back! Every year, TEF hosts the Earth Day 5K/10K in conjunction with Green Events, a race management company based in Fort Collins. Formerly known as the Loveland Classic, the 2023 Earth Day 5K/10K will be held on Saturday, April 22. The course winds through the Lakes at Centerra neighborhood, intersecting with High Plains Environmental Center, and stays completely on paths with no road crossings. The course makes the race a fun and relaxing event and very safe for kids and families.

Another important fundraiser, the Scheer Fund Golf Tournament, is held at Mariana Butte golf course in August each year. This tournament supports the Dr. Stan Scheer Memorial Student Opportunity Fund. The fund was created in memory of Dr. Stan Scheer, a former TSD superintendent. A lifelong educator, Dr. Scheer exemplified going the extra mile when caring for others in both challenging and celebratory times. The Scheer Student Opportunity Fund emulates his legacy for students, and, Kim shared, “The fund provides gap funding for individual student opportunities and allows TEF to say ‘yes’ to a wider variety of requests from teachers.”

The Thompson Educational Foundation offers wonderful opportunities for people to help support students and teachers, and it’s life changing. Says Kim, “Our programs, whether they’re helping make a difference for a student that is struggling in school or supporting a student’s passion…you see the student light up and you see the impact our organization makes.”

Jeanette Fellows Photography

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