

Viking Pride looks to increase membership

Recent donation to schools pushes total past \$212,000 in three years

By JOSEPH DOMELOWICZ JR.
joe@winthroptranscript.com

In the past 2-1/2 years, the Winthrop Viking Pride Foundation has worked hard to raise money within the community to support Winthrop's schools, while simultaneously creating a longtime endowment fund.

In less than three years, Viking Pride has raised more than \$500,000, given more than \$212,000 which has gone to support intramural, after-school, in-class projects and athletic programs and built an endowment of more than \$230,000.

That \$212,000 in donations to the schools includes a recent \$72,800 donation to support several clubs and athletic programs at the high school and middle school, but doesn't include the 2006-07 classroom grant requests for teachers and students in all four Winthrop schools.

With newly-elected Viking Pride President Al Petrilli in place, the Viking Pride board sees its mission as just starting.

"Our challenge after 2 1/2 years, is that everybody already sees our organization as successful, so we have to guard against complacency," said Petrilli. "The demands that are on us are also increasing, so our challenge is to find a way to continue to meet those needs at the schools, while building our endowment and doing so, without constantly going back to the same pool of donors."

Petrilli said a major goal for Viking Pride this year is to build the organization's membership base.

"Our goal is to get people to understand that if we can increase the number of members we have, each member could give less and we could still meet the goals we have of supporting the different programs in the schools," said Petrilli.

Petrilli noted that Viking Pride membership costs \$100 per year, but for every 100 members, the group raises \$10,000. However, with a membership base of just 500, Viking Pride must rely on larger donations from its members and annual and semiannual fund-

raisers.

"At the Great Reunion [held in July], we drew over 700 people, but the real value in that event is that we now have a large group of people, who were not involved with Viking Pride before, who now know what our organization is about and hopefully, we can get them to become members," he said. "At the same time, we have to get parents to understand, that the money we've given back to the school system has helped to defray the cost of things like athletic user fees, and if they could each take just a portion of the money they've saved through the lower user fees, and use that to join Viking Pride, we might be able to lower those fees even further."

Petrilli admitted one problem in attracting new members is people's perception that Viking Pride solely supports high school athletics.

"The fact is that a great deal of the money that we give back to the schools goes to support programs that are not sports related and are not taking place at the high school," said Petrilli.

For example, the recent \$72,846 donation made by Viking Pride to the school department has been earmarked for 10 high school non-sports related clubs and four at the middle school. The list includes funding for a band director, math team, drama club, school newspaper, art club, Law Day mock trial team, personal fitness club, student council activity fund, choreographer and music director at the high school, a drama director, chorus director, substitutes for the middle school and an eighth-grade algebra pilot program. It also funded a specific request for athletic department expenditures and a reduction in athletic users fees at both the middle school and high school.

Also, the group's fundraising efforts don't stop with that \$72,800 donation.

When school begins, teachers from across the system, including those in the elementary grades, may submit grant requests for programs and projects that cannot be funded through the schools' budgets. Petrilli estimated after those grant requests are filled, the total Viking Pride donation will prob-



From left to right Al Petrilli, president of the Viking Pride Foundation, School Committee Chairwoman Pat Milano and Superintendent of Schools Steve Jenkins were all on hand at a recent School Committee meeting, where Petrilli presented the school department with a check for \$72,846 from the Viking Pride Foundation, to help fund a variety of co-curricular extra-curricular activities at the Winthrop High School and Winthrop Middle School. The group's generosity will not stop there, though, as Viking Pride preparing to accept applications from school teachers across the system, minigrants for projects that augment regular lesson plans in the schools.

ably top \$100,000 this year.

"Our goal is to not have to say no to any grant request, because we know that these teachers are trying to propose programs and projects that will benefit the way our children learn in the Winthrop schools," said Petrilli.

Unfortunately, Petrilli added, less than one-third of parents have joined Viking Pride.

"We have to make sure that parents really understand what we are about and what we are trying to do," said Petrilli. "We are really no different from all of those other

parents in town. We're just parents that are trying to help our children so that they don't have to take back seat to anyone else."

"The membership drive is really the focus of this year's effort," said Petrilli. "The big events, the Great Reunion or the corporate sponsorship drive, give us the credibility we need to keep asking for help, but the bottom line is that we need the support of the people that our efforts really benefit, that's the parents, the teachers and the students themselves."

