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October 1, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**“Project Starfish” Recipient of \$10,000 U.S. Venture, Inc./BP “Fueling Communities” Grant**

Thanks to a generous \$10,000 grant from U.S. Venture, Inc./BP “Fueling Communities” a new “Project Starfish Fund” has been established within the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. The fund provides monies to Fox Cities schools to narrow the achievement gap by providing economically disadvantaged students resources they otherwise would not be able to obtain on their own. Identified students are assisted with co-curricular fees, school supplies, field trip expenses, special apparel and the like, making it possible for them to actively engage in their school experience. In return, student grant recipients are asked to “pay it forward” with volunteer service of their choosing at their school. The opportunity to give back to their community provides valuable life lessons, builds self-esteem, and nurtures good citizenship. Project Starfish's motto is “One Matters”; the program's core principle is instilling the spirit of giving back and making a difference, one person and one act of kindness at a time.

Project Starfish was founded in 2008 by Appleton parent and community volunteer, Jean Detjen. A \$1,500 grant from the Schmidt Family Foundation/U.S. Venture provided seed money for a pilot program at James Madison Middle School in Appleton. Per Detjen, “Dave Hash was Madison's principal at the time. He was the first school leader to embrace Project Starfish and was a strong advocate for this program until his death in October, 2009 after a courageous battle with brain cancer. Dave was an exceptionally loving and giving person who touched the hearts of countless people, and through this program we honor his never-ending spirit of finding something special in each and every child.” To date, sixteen Fox Valley public schools - ten middle schools, four elementary school and two high schools - have implemented Project Starfish and hundreds of students have been awarded grants. “Dave would be thrilled to see how much this program has grown and continues to flourish.”

Grant requests range in dollar amount and scope, typically falling in the \$5-50 range. Said Detjen, “Every child should have the opportunity to participate and learn from school activities. We see a lot of requests come in for school field trips. Starfish has also helped kids pay for things like yearbooks, learn to ski trips, musical fees, school dances, club tee shirts, mini-courses, class photos, school supplies, glasses, kids cab transportation, folk fair, foreign language camps, athletic shoes, sports program and other club fees. One of the more interesting requests was an alarm clock for a student who was often late getting to school. The requests may seem simple, but for kids it can make all the difference to getting the most out of school and fitting in with their peers.”

Added Detjen, "We really try to be sensitive to students that are already feeling a lot of stress due to financial troubles at home and how that can translate to their experiences at school. Feeling like they're earning things important to them is very empowering for kids. Often the biggest worry for parents experiencing job loss, homelessness, and other difficulties is how they're kids are doing. Project Starfish helps relieve some of the financial burden while respecting the dignity of struggling families."

"People often ask it's difficult to get grant recipients to fulfill their volunteer expectation, but what we usually see is a sense of pride and enthusiasm to do their part. We ask kids to come up with their own ideas as how they would like to give back. The goal is to provide a positive volunteering experience that encourages self-reflection on their personal interests and gifts that can be shared to better their community. We try to encourage them to think creatively about what they might like to do to pay it forward."

'Pay-it-forwards' have included things like school building and grounds clean-up/maintenance, planting flowers, LMC help, artwork promoting special events and programs, selling dance tickets, lunch room help, library re-shelving, writers booklet illustrations, musical assistance, sorting sports uniforms, cleaning athletic equipment shed, peer tutoring, after school care program assistance, outdoor global classroom help, assistance with special needs students (a unique program was actually created for them by a high school grant recipient).

Teachers are the primary liaisons for students receiving grants, with added assistance from social workers, guidance counselors and school principals. Depending on their age, kids can apply for a grant on their own, or a parent can make a request on their child's behalf. "The benefits of Project Starfish are multi-faceted. It's been especially wonderful to see the mentoring relationship that naturally happens with the process."

The BP "Fueling Communities" program provides grant donations to local non-profit organizations that are nominated by local BP business owners to support the communities in which they do business. Fueling Communities gives back to local organizations that support health, education, youth, food and housing in order to spread charity and goodwill wherever it is needed most. Local business partner U.S. Venture, Inc., selected Project Starfish for a \$10,000 grant.

"When the U.S. Venture/Schmidt Family Foundation was approached with the idea of the Starfish program there was an immediate connection that tied directly to the impact areas of education. The Board saw this as a unique way to not only help students reach their full potential but show them the value of giving back through volunteering," stated Terri Green, U.S. Venture's Foundation Manager.

"U.S. Venture is a business invested in its community and committed to help improve the lives of others through volunteerism and charitable giving," said Detjen. "They have provided the financial support and leadership to help grow this community partnership involving students, parents, educators, businesses, and non-profits. We are fortunate to live in a responsive and giving community that lives the spirit of compassion. Hopefully

this collaboration will provide inspiration for communities dealing with increasing poverty and other related challenges."

The child poverty rate has gone up, with 20 percent living in poverty. Wisconsin's poverty rate grew at more than twice the rate of the rest of the nation over the last decade. Curt Detjen, President/CEO of The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region added, "Too many children are living in poverty and would not have opportunities without direct support. The Starfish program provides that without overhead costs, making sure every dollar counts."

"Establishing a non-endowed, field of interest spend-down fund at the Community Foundation is such a great step for the next phase of growing Project Starfish and reaching out to more schools stressed by budget cuts in the face of increasing poverty, homelessness, and other economic difficulties. Many people are looking for a way give hope and inspiration to kids needing a little help, and this partnership makes giving easy and rewarding for all involved," stated Detjen.

Anyone can make a tax-deductible contribution to "Project Starfish."

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS MAY BE SENT TO:

Project Starfish Fund

c/o The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, Inc.

4455 W. Lawrence St.

P.O. Box 563

Appleton, WI 54912

Checks should be made out to The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, Inc. with a notation that your charitable donation be designated to the Project Starfish Fund.

For more information please contact:

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<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Project-Starfish/114032641949814>

*THE STARFISH STORY: Early one morning a young girl was walking on the beach when she noticed thousands of stranded starfish. To save them she began tossing them, one at a time, back into the ocean. When a passerby told her she couldn't possibly save all the starfish, she tossed one into the ocean and replied, "Well, I made a difference to that one." Inspired by the little girl, others came to help. Together, they made a difference.*

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction - Enrollment by Economic Status  
"Economically Disadvantaged" 2010-11 (Poverty Status)

