

Grass-roots efforts helping LB schools



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Dateline
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Jim Kruger was your typical fourth-grader at Newcomb Elementary in 1969. He was a little lackadaisical and scared of his new teacher, Rosemary Fielder.

But all of that anxiety went away as Mrs. Fielder became Kruger's favorite teacher and the one he remembered the most 43 years later.

At a recent dinner celebrating the raising of more than \$1 million by the Newcomb Academy Foundation since 2003, Kruger said it was Mrs. Fielder's inspiration that led him to paying back his old school.

"Her life spanned 92 years and she lived and learned with a passion that planted a seed and remains with me to this day," he said. "Thank you, Rosemary, for making me measure up, believing in me and making me stretch."

Kruger is a founding director of the Newcomb Foundation, a grass-roots organization aimed at aggressively raising money for the K-8 school. The foundation is part of a growing trend by alumni and supporters to help some schools in the budget-starved Long Beach Unified School District.

The list of school-based foundations includes Prisk, Lowell, Fremont, Naples, Hughes, Longfellow, Cubberley and Newcomb. Other schools raise money through the Long Beach Education Foundation, a more common route.

"But we have seen these individual school foundations crop up in recent years as parents have sought ways to give back to our schools," said Chris Eftychiou, the LBUSD public information director.

Eftychiou said total funds donated by the community in recent years were: \$1.5 million in 2008-09; almost \$1.2 million in 2009-10 and almost \$1.5 million in 2010-11. A little more than half of these totals were donated by foundations and PTAs, he said. In addition to these numbers, the Long Beach Education Foundation raised \$1.1 million for distribution to schools this year.

Chris Steinhauer, LBUSD superintendent, said that while such fundraising efforts can't make up for the millions of dollars in cuts to Long Beach public schools, parents, alumni and others have been very generous with their donations and they are making a positive impact.

"They provide a great resource for some of the programs that have been cut," he said.

Thanks to the Newcomb Foundation, there are two fully equipped computer labs on campus, along with a computer



Jim Kruger, founding director of the Newcomb Foundation, reunites with his fourth-grade teacher, Rosemary Fielder. Kruger credits Mrs. Fielder, his teacher at then-Newcomb Elementary, for a lifelong love of education. At right, Kendly Walker, a student at the K-8 school, shows off her piano-playing skills during an open house this year. The foundation pays for music education.



aide, for both elementary and middle school students to use, Kruger said. All keyboarding equipment and music, along with the keyboarding instructor's salary, is paid for by the foundation, he said.

Other areas the foundation helps fund at Newcomb include science teachers and science lab supplies, technology aides and supplies, drama classes, home economics, marine biology, math club and photography.

Kruger said he is especially proud of the MIND program, starring a character that kids love, JiJi, a penguin. MIND combines music and math concepts to teach students.

Kruger said the foundation is working on a budget of \$144,525 for the coming school year.

"Our budgeting process is comprehensive and collaborative, driven on input and priorities established by administrators, teachers and parents," he said.

The foundation has no paid employees, only volunteers.

Kruger said the foundation is collaborating with the Newcomb PTA as school begins on a comprehensive membership drive to jump-start fundraising for this fiscal year.

Gray Lange, Newcomb principal, said the parental involvement at Newcomb is "the best I've ever seen."

Kruger said the Newcomb Foundation was born from frustration with the status quo.

"Enrichment curriculum was evaporating," he said. "Budgets were just beginning to quiver."

He credits his wife, Dawn, who served two terms as PTA president, with kick-starting his community involvement and eventual founding of the foundation with Juan Salcedo.

It's safe to say Kruger has Newcomb blood running through his veins.

"I come from two generations of the

Kruger family at Newcomb," he said. "Newcomb has been a huge part of my life. My sister and I graduated from there. My three children graduated from Newcomb."

In Kruger's other life, he is owner of Expertow, a towing company operating in the Greater Long Beach Area and Orange County, and a Keller Williams Realtor with his wife. He also is this year's president of Leadership Long Beach.

Kruger said the next challenge for the foundation is dealing with a major change at Newcomb. The school, built in the 1960s at 3351 Val Verde Ave. and named after Douglas A. Newcomb, long-time LBUSD superintendent, will be demolished and replaced by a new school at the same location over the next three years. In the meantime, starting with this fall's classes, Newcomb students will be educated at Keller Elementary, 7020 E. Brittain St.

The demolition of Newcomb and construction of a new school is made possible by Measure K, a ballot initiative approved by 71 percent of voters in 2008. Measure K makes available \$1.2 billion from property taxes to build, renovate and improve schools in the LBUSD.

The temporary location of Newcomb students at Keller makes no difference to Kruger or his foundation colleagues in their fundraising efforts.

"The foundation is always with the Newcomb community, wherever that may be," he said. "Everything provided at the current facility will be continued at the interim facility. Donors and volunteers will make it happen. We must have the resources to fuel young minds to build our intellectual infrastructure for the future."

Mrs. Fielder would be proud of her young pupil.

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