

Birmingham Public Schools: Education Foundation

Support from the Entire Community

By JANE PETERSON

Special to The Oakland Press

Birmingham parents and residents realize the importance of a quality education and the impact it has on the community as a whole. While the school district does all it can with the funds it receives, many times learning can be enhanced with other programs and initiatives. That's where the Birmingham Education Foundation comes in.

The foundation seeks to support the district's curriculum by funding enriching educational experiences for students. Thanks to the generous donations of community members and businesses, the Birmingham Education Foundation (BEF) provides grants in three curriculum areas: Academics, arts and athletics.

Identified as essential areas to developing well-rounded, creative students, the goal of the BEF is to build upon classroom lessons and the excellent education that Birmingham Public Schools is known for.

"The BEF initiatives are largely driven by the school district and the needs of our teachers and students," said Laura Couger, BEF executive director. "We award foundation grants that support the district wide initiatives, like trips to the DIA for all 8th graders and the 4th grade trip to the DSO (Detroit Symphony Orchestra). We also bring in a different children's author annually to hold workshops with all of our elementary students."

Knowing that the BEF is there for them, teachers and administrators are able to explore innovative and creative programs designed to allow students to develop new skills, master concepts using a different technique or simply inspire them to learn more and follow their interests.

"The other initiatives we support are driven by our Great Idea Grants. These grants are intended to support programs

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DAVID REED

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that benefit students in a particular school or classroom and are often developed as pilot programs to test new ideas," said Couger. "Once a program has proven successful, a foundation grant can be sought to fund the initiative on a larger scale."

Couger said grant requests are brought before a BEF grant review committee monthly. She said many factors are reviewed when determining if a grant will be awarded or not, but generally the committee looks for projects that impact the greatest number of students and which cannot be funded by the district.

"We are always looking for collabora-

tive partnerships with different organizations, including our school PTSA groups," said Couger.

She added that the community has been very supportive of the foundation's efforts.

"We have seen a significant increase in the number of people volunteering their time and talents to help the foundation grow. As we face these challenging financial times and as state school funding decreases, the community realizes the unique opportunity the foundation provides to funnel discretionary funds back into the district," said Couger. "These funds will ensure Birmingham Public Schools remains an exemplary provider of public education."

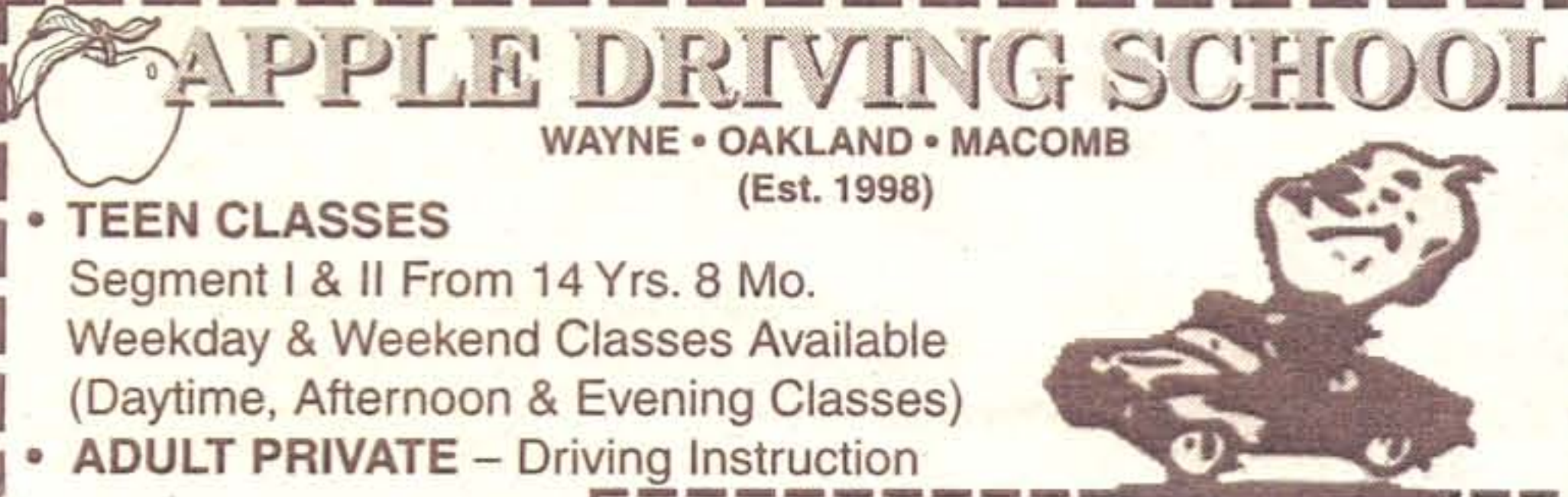
A great way to discover more about the foundation, its initiatives and special events is to visit www.supportBEF.org. The foundation's biggest fundraiser of the year is the 5th Annual Unabashed Bash on Jan. 31, 2009. The theme of the dinner/dance will be "Ignite Your Inner Child," which ties into new BPS initiatives focused on preparing students to be 21st century learners.

"As a volunteer organization, there are big and small ways to become involved, all of them greatly appreciated," said Couger.

To make a tax-deductible donation, contribute to an endowment fund or become involved in event planning, contact the Birmingham Education

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Foundation at (248) 203-3030 or visit www.supportBEF.org. The foundation has numerous ways to contribute to their mission including employer matching gifts, incremental gifts pledged over time, event sponsorships, memorial gifts and the Commemorative Brick program.



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