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FEATURED

## Wood River Women's Foundation celebrates 2022 grantees

New \$100,000 focus grant to improve early childhood education

By EMILY JONES Express Staff Writer

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Now in its 16th season, the Wood River Women's Foundation grants over \$330,000 annually to local nonprofits. The foundation doled out a record-high \$348,000 to 19 charitable groups this year.

Photo courtesy of the WRWF

With views of Bald Mountain, a manicured lawn spread beyond French window walls and the smell of fresh-baked bread in the air, about 300 women gathered under the Trail Creek Cabin tent last Wednesday—as they do every year—to honor more than a dozen local nonprofit organizations.

The philanthropists—members of the Wood River Women’s Foundation—were there to celebrate the beneficiaries of the foundation’s record-high \$348,000 grant cycle this year.

Since its founding in 2005, the foundation has awarded over \$3 million to nonprofit groups in the Wood River Valley. Of its annual \$1,100 membership fee, \$1,000 is distributed among all grant recipients, and \$100 goes to operating expenses.



This year’s pooled grants—between \$6,500 and \$20,000 each—went to 14 nonprofits, and five additional nonprofits received \$2,400 unrestricted grants. The funding will directly support housing for essential workers, tutoring for disadvantaged youth, outdoor initiatives, and various local healthcare, social and mental health services.

One new cause for celebration at the Trail Creek luncheon was the foundation’s pilot Focus Grant, a special-purpose, two-year grant of up to \$200,000 intended to raise test scores and increase kindergarten readiness.



The Focus Grant recipient—Boise-based Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children—will use the \$100,000 provided by the women’s foundation this year to help form the pilot Wood River Valley Early Learning Collaborative program.

Keynote speaker Beth Oppenheimer, the executive director of the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children, addresses Wood River Women's Foundation members on Wednesday, Aug. 3.

Express photo by Roland Lane

(The AEYC matched that grant at \$100,000 this year and received an additional \$25,000 on top of that from the Idaho STEM Action Center for a grand total of \$225,000, according to new Foundation

Director Sandy McCullough.)

Keynote speaker Beth Oppenheimer, the executive director of the Idaho AEYC, said that the quality of a child's early learning environment can impact their growth and development "for better, or in some cases and unfortunately, for worse.

"The first five years of a child's life lays the foundation for later learning and development. As a matter of fact, 90% of a child's brain is developed by the age of five—a critical period for cognitive, social and behavioral development," she told the crowd. "Here, we understand that parents are a child's first and most influential teachers, but due to the demands of work and providing for their family, they must seek care and education outside of the home."

According to the Wood River Women's Foundation, the new learning collaborative will bring together stakeholders from the Blaine County School District, local childcare and medical centers and the Hispanic community and put together data on why families "do or do not have access to support or preschools." It will then use that needs assessment to form a program to support transitions between early childhood and K-12 schools.

For more information, visit [www.woodriverwomensfoundation.org](http://www.woodriverwomensfoundation.org).

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