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FEATURED

Celebrating Aspire students' success

by Michele Nelson roundup staff reporter Jan 26, 2018 Updated Jan 26, 2018



Aspire Arizona Foundation students, who received an A in one or more classes, gathered with their teachers for breakfast at The Rim Club. More than 50 students attended.

Michele Nelson/Roundup

More than 50 students attended the second annual Aspire Arizona Foundation Breakfast at The Rim Club to celebrate their accomplishments on Jan. 19.

The breakfast, hosted by AAF and paid for by the MHA Foundation, allowed the AAF board and donors to mingle with the students their dollars supported. The foundation assures each donor that 100 percent of their donations goes to support scholarships.

The breakfast honored all the students who received an A in one or more of their dual-credit classes. (Dual credit classes provide both high school and college credits to a student.)

AAF generally only covers the tuition for one class, but will cover two classes for students earning As.

At the breakfast, President Tom Slonaker announced that seven of the students at the breakfast would graduate from high school with 32 college credits. That year of college credit could save their families \$20,000 if they attended an Arizona university.

Slonaker said most of the students in dual-credit courses are juniors. That means they will have several college credits by the time they leave high school and possibly have their first year of college finished.

Freshmen like Alyssa Boerst could actually graduate with an associate degree as well as her high school diploma.

Boerst said she took a math course.

"I took algebra in seventh grade," she said.

That means she was ready for calculus by the time she reached high school.

Her story illustrates one of the other benefits of AAF, keeping accelerating kids in classes at their level.

Other students, such as Rachel Lehman, hope to pursue their dreams through college.

"I want to be an orthopedic surgeon," she said.

Her grandfather inspired her to this path after he broke a hip. Lehman has decided she would like to help those like him.

Slonaker not only praised the students, he expressed his gratitude for those who had donated to the Aspire Arizona Foundation — many of whom donate simply from the goodness of their hearts.

“We gather also to thank those of you who have provided significant financial support for the dual credit program,” said Slonaker. “To my knowledge, only two or three donors have a child or grandchild enrolled in this program. Instead, our donors have provided generous financial support because they realize the value of education and the profound impact it can have on your life.”

Besides honoring all of the students and donors, the organizers had Hope Parker, an inspirational speaker and associate director of the K-12 Outreach for Arizona State University's School of Engineering, speak to inspire the students to reach for their dreams.

She said she came from a town smaller than Payson in Montana, but with just as big a heart.

“They watched out for their youth,” she said.

Parker praised the Aspire program telling the gathered students that having such a supportive community makes all the difference in the world — just as her community did for her.

“Nobody in my family had ever gone to college before,” said Parker. “My community came and said to me, ‘We believe in you.’”

She ultimately graduated and then obtained a master's degree. She's since then held two high-powered jobs with ASU.

“Don't limit yourself on thinking about what you can't do,” said Parker. “We limit what our dreams can be ... shoot for the stars and the skies will open.”

Parker could have been talking to the AAF board as well. They hope that by investing in the kids of Rim Country, they will see the reward of successful, independent and happy citizens.

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Michele Nelson

I cover education, families, non-profits, water issues and investigative reporting

Since 2016 Aspire has:

Paid \$65,000 in tuition support

Funded six master's level teachers at the high school

Almost 200 students attended college classes

69% of 2017 PHS and Aspire graduates went on to college compared to 42%

240 students received A's

102 received B's

229 students took math

176 took English

37 students took Chemistry/Physics

10 took Social Science