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Small School Makes Big Impact

Several years ago, St. Mary's school in Tomahawk was on the verge of closing down due to lack of money and dwindling interest. Now, only a few short years later, that same school is nearly breaking enrollment records. Although several factors have contributed to its quick turnaround, progress can be attributed to the leadership measures taken by the three adults who comprise the Home and School Committee.

Equivalent to a PTO/PTA group, the Home and School Committee recently received recognition upon winning a contest sponsored by PTO Today, a monthly educational magazine. Named the Outstanding Parent Group of the Year, the group's efforts netted a \$500 award, as well as pictures and an article in the next issue of PTO Today.

To win the award, Cherie Duplayee-Brown, president of the Home and School Committee, wrote a four page essay detailing how far St. Mary's has come over the past year. "It's hard to get parents involved to a certain level. People get tired of getting asked, and our goal is always to incorporate new parents," said Duplayee-Brown. "We've done a lot to try and encourage family involvement."

Examples include refraining from traditional fundraisers. "St. Mary's prides itself in not selling candy bars, wrapping paper, or cookie dough. We don't give a kid a box of chocolates and hope they pull through for us," she explained. Instead, the school focuses on sponsoring a monthly event within the Tomahawk community.

Popular events include the Father/Daughter dance, Mother/Son "date night", and the Time and Treasure raffle. However, the annual Community Gala at Inshalla and a bake sale booth at Harley's Fall Ride generate the highest amount of revenue.

Those food booth funds are then donated directly back to Harley for MDA. "We aim to teach kids that life is more about giving than getting. It's amazing to watch. But most importantly, the kids have fun," explained Duplayee-Brown.

On average, the Home and School Committee raises around \$30,000 each year. The money is stretched over several categories such as teaching salaries, tuition assistance and general school maintenance.

A primary focus of the Home and School Committee was perfecting the monthly meetings. Moving the gathering to an earlier time allowed more parents to incorporate it into their schedules amidst hectic school nights. Each class rotates the responsibility of providing dinner for the meetings, which saves the committee money and ensures that the same parents aren't always expected to foot the bill.

Other members of the group for the 2007-2008 school year were Julie Strassmann, treasurer, and Nicole Brown, secretary. Members serve a two year term. The 2008-2009 committee will kick off with two new members: Melinda Kreuger, Vice President, and Amy Werner, secretary.

According to Duplayee-Brown, the upcoming school year looks just as promising as the last. "I couldn't be more excited about this year. The parents have been so good to us, asking what they can do to help. All I did was write the letter for the award."

She also pointed out the importance of keeping the current good relations with the Tomahawk public school district. "You have to realize that it's not a competition between the schools. When people are supportive, it's infectious."