

Parent-Led Foundation Wins Online Charity Contest to Benefit MPS Immersion Schools

May 24, 2011, Milwaukee, WI – The German Immersion Foundation (GIF) will host a special event, Friday, May 27th at 12:45 pm., where it will receive a \$15,000 donation from WaterStone Bank in response to placing fifth out of nearly 280 local organizations recently competing in the bank's 90th anniversary charity contest. GIF is a non-profit fundraising organization dedicated to supporting the Milwaukee German Immersion School (MGIS) and Milwaukee School of Languages (MSL).

The assembly will take place at MGIS, a K4 through fifth grade Milwaukee Public School, and a beneficiary of the donation, during its annual Kinderfest Day (Children's Festival Day). The event celebrates the Foundation's ability to rally MGIS and MSL staff, families, students and alumni to secure this funding, critical to helping the school and its sister high school maintain high-performing standards despite continued budget cuts. MGIS and MSL are two of only six language immersion schools within Milwaukee's 184-school system.

The Foundation is one of only five area organizations, and the only one with an affiliation to the MPS system, that won WaterStone bank's recent online charity contest. The top five organizations with the most online votes during the month-long competition received a donation from the WaterStone Bank Foundation.

"We are very grateful for this opportunity WaterStone Bank has provided for our Foundation to win much needed funding to support the Milwaukee German Immersion School and Milwaukee School of Languages," said Mike Carroll, GIF President. "In light of current budget cuts, these opportunities become even more valuable for public schools such as ours, which are attempting to provide unique educational opportunities to the youth of Milwaukee, under increasingly difficult circumstances."

Funding from the WaterStone Bank contest helps the Foundation support its Amity Intern Program, which brings teaching interns from German-speaking countries to help students learn from native speakers. This important program has become even more vital given the increased pressure on teachers, due to the current public school budget environment. This additional funding now allows GIF to redirect funds otherwise slotted for the intern program to support other areas of need at MGIS and MSL, at a time when both schools have been hard hit by budget cuts.

"Not all of our teachers are native speakers, so we really value these wonderful language models for the children," said Dr. Albert Brugger, principal of MGIS. "They come directly from Germany, so they know the most current culture, and are able to teach our students about the different areas they are from, providing a great frame of reference regarding parts of the world that utilize the language the children become fluent in."

Not only does the contest win mean additional funding, it also has been a much needed rallying point for parents frustrated by continuing public school budget cuts.

"It was a very unifying thing for our school community and I couldn't have imagined that it could bring so many people together to support our mission. I'm just elated," said Brugger. In addition to many staff and students' families, voters weighed in from more than 20 states and a dozen countries.

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German Immersion Foundation Release Continued

Vadrian Zagar, a K5 mother at MGIS, agreed that the contest was well timed to help many parents like her find a way to make a difference in the face of budget cuts they can't control.

"We go to listening sessions about the MPS budget cuts and feel so helpless, but this was one thing we could do to feel like we were supporting our children and trying to maintain the above average education our school provides," she said. Zagar was one of hundreds of parents and staff who spent many hours voting during the competition as well as recruiting friends and family to join in.

"When you know your school has some of the highest test scores in the district, even compared to private schools, it is disheartening to hear that excellence could be in jeopardy," she continued. "WaterStone's contest not only helped us do something about the budget cuts, but it has spurred our community into investigating even more ways to raise funds for our schools."

About the German Immersion Foundation

The German Immersion Foundation (GIF) was founded in 2001 by parents and teachers of the Milwaukee German Immersion School, offering K4 through fifth grade education, and the Milwaukee School of Languages, a 6-12 school, to help maintain quality education in the face of consecutive years of budget cuts.

Full language immersion is an approach to instruction in which the usual curricular activities are conducted in a foreign language. By the time students finish Kindergarten they are fluent in German and English. By the end of fifth grade they are fully bilingual in reading, writing and speaking, having received 5,200 hours of instruction in German. Once they complete high school at MSL, they can earn the equivalent of 16 college credits in German.

For more information, visit www.germanimmersionfoundation.org.

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GIF Media Contact:

Dianna Steinbach
414-737-1433, claritypoint@gmail.com

MGIS Contact:

Dr. Albert Brugger, principal
414-393-5600, bruggeaj@milwaukee.k12.wi.us