

A good way to part with our money

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This Thursday, May 3, the San Mateo Rotary Club will be honoring students who have just received Rotary college scholarships. These are a lucky group of kids. Not only because they are receiving much needed help with their future education but because they have what it takes to overcome adversity and become successful. Some have a sick parent who is out of work. Most have families who cannot contribute to the costs of a community or four-year college. Some are homeless or nearly homeless. Many will be the first generation to attend college and many come from immigrant families. Students attend Hillsdale, Aragon, San Mateo and Serra high schools.

This year, San Mateo Rotary will be distributing about \$56,000 to 25 students headed to four-year colleges. The scholarships range from \$1,000 to \$4,000 per student and are given directly to the college to help pay tuition, books, room and board. Financial need is the critical issue, according to Margaret Taylor who served on the selection committee along with co-chair John Root and many other Rotarians. But the student is also evaluated on grades; school, work and community activities; and the determination to meet his or her goals.

The club also will also distribute about \$13,000 in scholarships for community college students. Nineteen students were awarded amounts ranging from \$250-\$1,000. "In general," according to Chris Lundquist, who chairs these scholarships, " we are looking for students where we can make a difference and who are motivated to continue their education past high school."

The scholarship funds are raised within the club from members. When you join Rotary, you are expected to dig deep into your pocket to help fund these and other community programs. But it's more than just money. Rotarians spend hours interviewing students, reviewing applications and tax returns. A Rotarian is assigned to each four-year applicant to interview the student, make a home visit, advocate and appear with the student before the panel which makes the final decision. This year, some of the Rotarians on the interview panels were so touched by a few of the student's stories that they offered to match whatever Rotary gave.

Foster City Rotarian Hans Eide founded The Cambodia Academy at Mongkol Borei in 2004. He was struck by the need of children in rural villages where education is neither compulsory nor affordable. Their families were victims of the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge. Hans, with the help of other Rotarians, turned an underutilized building into an elementary and middle school for 264 students, grades 4-8. He is now working on adding a building for grades 1-3. You can learn more at Cambodiaacademy.org.

Closer to home, Samaritan House will be hosting its 20th annual gala, May 12, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Burlingame to help raise funds for the many things they do for those in need in San Mateo County. They provide food, shelter, medical and dental care and much more to our poorest residents. Last Saturday night, the San Mateo Library Foundation hosted a dinner featuring Khaled Hosseini, author of "The Kite Runner. " The event helped raise funds to support a number of activities to keep our community connected including Project Read, biotechnology, the business resource center and special children's programs.



Paul Constantino called to remind us how important those care packages are for the troops. His son, Patrick, a lieutenant with the 2nd infantry division, is serving in Afghanistan. Paul's daughter, Elizabeth Anne, just graduated from West Point. If you go to www.sanmateocountybluestarmoms.org you can find several ways to send those goody boxes to our men and women overseas. As for the Constantinos, what a remarkable family. Paul's identical twin Tom served on the San Mateo County Community College District Board for 17 years. Tom served in the Marines and won a Legion of Merit while Paul served in the Army during the Vietnam war. The Constantino family has set up a scholarship fund at the College of San Mateo in honor of Tom.

We all receive solicitations from wonderful organizations. But, one advantage of giving locally — and the above is just a small sample of your choices in San Mateo County — is you know the people in charge and how the funds will be spent. Dig deep!

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