

Making a Difference – One Scholar at a Time

By: Sandy Pugliese, Santee-Lakeside Rotary Club

The Santee-Lakeside Rotary Club is all about making a difference, especially in the lives of youth. Back in the late 1980s, club past presidents congregated to determine what would be a meaningful project for the club to establish – one that would have a long-term impact on the communities' youth.

Doug Giles, then the superintendent of the Santee School District, shared a story about his youth and an encounter he had with a woman who had taken an interest in him at a critical point in his life. She listened to his story and, out of the kindness of her heart, provided him with some guidance and support. This story really resonated with the past presidents and they agreed they'd like to start a scholar program in support of local youth. This desire was the genesis of the Santee-Lakeside Rotary Club's Foundation. Believing that Rotarians could offer friendship and support to students who had issues in their lives that might inhibit them from graduating from high school, the Club Foundation designed a program that would assist students at the three local high schools one goal in mind – help them graduate from high school. They paid particular attention in the development not to brand students publically as "at risk". The deal was this – graduate and Rotary will pay for your first two academic years of college at a community college. In rare cases and at the discretion of the Foundation board, some students have had additional academic years funded. Initially, the Foundation funded scholarships for one student at each high school – Santana, El Capitan and West Hills. Conditional upon ample funding, the Foundation has and is currently funding three students from each of the three schools. If selected, students sign a contract that lays out the following expectations:

- ♦ Maintain a 2.00 GPA
- ♦ Provide 20 hours of community service each school year, of which five hours must be at a Santee-Lakeside Rotary Club event.
- ♦ Remain drug, alcohol and crime free
- ♦ Graduate on time and with their class.

Over the years, more than 100 students have benefited from this program and graduated from high school, with many moving on to attend college.

With the Club now supporting 45 students in any given year (9 students in grades 10-14), a formal mentoring program was developed to support these students and a program coordinator was established to act as a liaison between the club, students, high schools and the college campuses. The club pays \$1000 a month for this position.

Each member of the Santee-Lakeside Rotary Club is asked to be a mentor to at least one student and in doing so provides guidance and advice, acts as a role model and serves as a motivator to his/her student. Student contact varies depending on the personality of both the student and mentor but you can be sure that students are always contacted after grades are posted.

The Santee-Lakeside Club provides mentor training in how to connect with a student and how to keep them engaged. Contact can range from phone calls to home, email, snail mail and attendance at school or scholar program functions.

Club mentors receive their student assignment in July. There is a welcome back dinner planned soon after school begins and a variety of activities throughout the year that bring students and mentors together.