

# building foundations

*When Marcy Lynn McNeal visits a school and sees the joy in a young child's eyes as she plays the violin or hears the pride expressed by a high school student who helped create a literary magazine or the sees excitement shown by students using LEGO Robotics to learn about engineering, she realizes all the work she and her team at Poudre Valley School District (PSD) Foundation have done was well worth it.*



marcy:mcneal

"There are two things that keep me going," said the foundation's executive director. "Supporting teachers who work so hard to make wonderful things happen for kids and providing opportunities to kids."

Marcy looks back fondly on her school days here in Fort Collins. She remembers Mr. Spangler at Bennett Elementary and how much fun she had in his class. He always played basketball with the kids during recess and he pushed Marcy to be more creative and to think about things differently. She remembers her ninth-grade English teacher Mrs. Smith, who taught her a valuable lesson about turning assignments in on time.

"When I think of those teachers who made a difference in my life, I am always very thankful to them," Marcy said. "I know how hard their job is and I know that sometimes it can feel thankless."

Marcy's compassion for teachers stems from the fact that her father and uncle were both teachers in PSD. Her dad was the orchestra director at Rocky Mountain High and retired just three years ago. Her uncle was the orchestra director at Fort Collins High School. In fact, the McNeal Auditorium at FCHS is named after him. It is no surprise, then, that Marcy's career path led to a job that supports teachers.

Following high school, Marcy attended Colorado State University for one year. She realized she needed a break from school and some time to figure out what she wanted to do with her life. She left school and Fort Collins for about one and one-half years and then returned with clearer view of her future.

She enrolled at CSU once again and became active in Associated Students of Colorado State University (ASCSU), the student government group on campus. A born leader, Marcy soon found

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herself in the role of director of activities. She worked with a small group of students organizing concerts and events.

After getting a degree in business management with an emphasis in marketing, she became the assistant director at TEAM Fort Collins, an organization created to help schools, workplaces and the community support and promote responsible choices and healthy behavior. She worked her way up and eventually got the job of executive director.

When the position opened up at the Poudre School District Foundation, Marcy felt ready for a new challenge. With her strong background in the workings of a nonprofit and her managerial skills, the PSD Foundation was off to a strong start with her leading the way.

In 2001, Marcy became the first full-time staff member to be hired by the PSD Foundation. The foundation distributes grant money to teachers to fund projects and programs that aren't covered by school budgets. Teachers apply for the grants and they can get up to \$5,000.

Marcy was excited about the opportunity to build the organization from scratch and to be able to give back to the community where she grew up. She surrounded herself with a competent staff, allowing her to focus on the most important aspects of her job.

"I believe that you hire the right people and then you stay out of their way," she said. "You should be there to support them, but then let them do the job you hired them to do."

Marcy said she believes the foundation is showing teachers that they are valued by providing them with the money needed to enhance the educational experiences for their students. The money helps the district be on the cutting edge of teaching and continue its history of excellence, she said.

"We are the champions for teachers," Marcy said. "A supporter for what they do, what they can accomplish and the impact they can have."

In May of 2007, the foundation distributed more than \$86,000 in grant money to 24 teachers around the district for everything from science to literacy to cooking.

Marcy said she believes whole-heartedly that children deserve opportunities to have the best education possible. The funds provided by the foundation allow teachers the chance to provide that for them.

The feedback she has received from teachers continues to reinforce for her the importance of the foundation. A science teacher from Fort Collins High School told her the technology he purchased with the foundation's grant was the single best thing he had ever been able to do in the classroom. For Marcy, comments like this mean a lot.

One of the greatest rewards Marcy has received from her job is the opportunity to share in the giving. Marcy gets to meet with people and organizations that want to support local schools.

"I enjoy helping them feel wonderful about being philanthropic," she said. "I hope that I get to help everyone we work with feel good about giving and the giving experience."

Alongside the rewards, however, are challenges. Twenty-four grants were approved this year, but 38 had to be turned down. For Marcy, it is difficult knowing she can't give money to all the teachers who apply.

"There are so many needs in education, so many issues teachers and staff deal with in helping students that it can be hard to prioritize where we are going to concentrate our efforts," she said.

Marcy is devoted to her work and puts in long hours. When she isn't working, she loves hanging out with her 9-year-old daughter, who she said is her inspiration. Currently, Marcy lives on the north side of town with her daughter. She enjoys being close to Old Town, where she can take advantage of the many concerts, restaurants and family activities available. On Saturday mornings, Marcy and her daughter like to ride their bikes to the farmers' market.

Through her work at the PSD Foundation, Marcy positively impacts many students and teachers. Eventually, that impact extends to the rest of the community; helping to make Fort Collins a great place to live.

To learn more about the PSD Foundation, the grants they have funded or how to donate, visit [www.psdfoundation.org](http://www.psdfoundation.org). ❖



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