



OLI News

12 Oregon Nonprofits Reap \$95,500 in Literacy Grants from Verizon

'Check into Literacy' Customer Donations Benefit 2 Agencies

BEAVERTON, Ore. - Verizon today awarded \$95,500 in literacy grants to 12 nonprofit recipients based in Washington County, Gresham, Silverton and the southern Oregon coast.

The grants from the Verizon Foundation and Verizon Reads were presented during a celebration of literacy at Cedar Mill Community Library in Washington County attended by Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski. The governor read to a group of children and praised officials at Cedar Mill and other area libraries for a summer reading program that was funded in part by Verizon.

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Verizon Reads is a public charity that distributes funds collected through the company's Check into Literacy program. Verizon customers support the program with voluntary contributions through their phone bills. The company in turn donates to literacy projects in the states where the money was given. This year's recipients include Oregon Literacy Inc. (\$10,000) and SMART (\$5,500).

In addition to the Check into Literacy grants, the Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications, awarded \$80,000 to organizations that submitted requests through a literacy request-for-proposal (RFP) announced earlier this year. Recipients were chosen based on community need, innovation, ability to execute, evaluation methods and other factors.

"These grants reaffirm Verizon's commitment to invest in the communities we serve as a telecommunications company," said Steve Banta, group president for Verizon's Northwest and Southwest regions. "They support projects that will improve basic reading and computer skills and make a positive difference in the lives of thousands of people." Banta added a main goal of the RFP was to focus on projects that link improved literacy rates to a better-educated and better-prepared work force. Verizon focuses its strategic philanthropy on work force development and technology as well as literacy.

Verizon awarded literacy grants to the following organizations:

- **Beaverton Literacy Council** will use a \$7,500 grant to teach survival English classes to adults. Verizon funds will be used to train additional volunteers, buy books, printing, and basic teaching supplies, and develop new tutoring sites equipped with computers to aid in employment training.

- **Care to Share, Beaverton**, will use most of a \$3,500 grant to purchase age-appropriate books for 600 children of low-income families. The goal is to encourage good reading habits, which are critical to success in school. Remaining funds will be applied to backpacks and other school supplies for the children, who are in grades 1-8 of the Beaverton School District.
- **The cooperative libraries of Washington and Clackamas counties** are using a \$15,000 grant to help fund a 16-week summer reading program. Verizon's grant has provided nearly 5,000 books for children who successfully meet their summer reading goals. The program will benefit a broad range of children from toddlers to teenagers. Research shows that children who participate in summer programs begin the school year with stronger reading skills.
- **Centro Cultural, Cornelius**, will use a \$9,500 grant to continue its Equipped for the Future project. This is a comprehensive training course that teaches English and computer skills to low-income and Hispanic individuals in western Washington County who lack a high school diploma. The overall goal is to help the students complete a General Equivalency Diploma and prepare for living-wage jobs. The program is offered in partnership with Portland Community College.
- **The Gresham-Barlow Education Foundation** will use a \$7,500 grant for the Rudy the Wannabe Reader program. It provides small-group support to non-readers or low-level readers in first and second grades, with the goal of helping them reach reading benchmarks by the time they are tested in third grade. Verizon funds will pay for reading materials chosen by specialists, including age-appropriate books the students can take home and keep.
- **The Oregon Child Development Coalition**, based in Wilsonville, will use a \$7,500 grant to support the West Washington County Family Literacy Collaborative, a partnership with Forest Grove human service agency Adelante Mujeres. The project will enable Hispanic adults to develop computer skills for employment training and to help their children become more technology-literate. Other funds will help create a mini-computer lab for adults and children to use individually or together.
- **Oregon Literacy Inc.**, a statewide organization based in Portland, will use a \$10,000 Check into Literacy grant to assist small volunteer programs focused on adult literacy. Free materials, assistance, resources and research will be provided to volunteer tutors and students. Funds will also match tutors and students with the local literacy program of their choice and help expand public awareness of adult literacy opportunities throughout Oregon.
- **Self Enhancement Inc., Portland**, will use a \$7,500 grant to extend into summer the focused academic reading program it began during the 2003-04 school year. The six-week program provides a comprehensive reading module for about 120 students from neighborhood elementary schools in northeast Portland.
- **SMART (Start Making A Reader Today)**, a statewide organization based in Portland, will use a \$5,500 Check Into Literacy grant to help underwrite this program for mostly low-income children in kindergarten through third grade. SMART recruits adult volunteers to visit public schools once a week and read to at-risk students. It also provides two free books a month to those students.

- **Silverton Together** will use a \$9,500 grant to support its **Hispanas Unidas Family Literacy Program, which is designed to reduce the high dropout rate among Latino students. A key strategy in that effort is to increase parental involvement. Parents will meet regularly with trained facilitators and learn literacy skills themselves to share with and encourage their children.**

Oregon coastal recipients of Verizon grants include:

- **South Coast Head Start, Coos Bay**, will use a \$5,000 grant to aid its Family Literacy Project, which features workshops that teach low-income parents how to be strong advocates for literacy in the home, community and public school system. The project expands on a program that was developed and field-tested by South Coast Head Start during the 2002-03 school year.
- **Southwestern Oregon Community College, Coos Bay**, will use a \$7,500 grant to purchase computers for the college's Newmark One Stop Career Center. The computers will be reserved for students in the adult basic education and English-as-a-second-language programs. Federal studies show ABE and ESL students who participate in computer-aided learning are much more successful in achieving their educational goals.

The Verizon Foundation in 2003 awarded more than 21,000 grants totaling about \$70 million to charitable and nonprofit agencies that focus on improving basic and computer literacy, enriching communities through technology, and creating a skilled work force. The foundation uses its resources in the United States and abroad to develop partnerships in technology and connect them with organizations serving the needs of diverse communities, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and the economically and socially disadvantaged.

The foundation also supports Verizon Volunteers, an incentive program that last year encouraged Verizon employees to volunteer 595,000 hours in their communities and provided \$34.6 million in combined contributions to charitable and nonprofit organizations. For more information on the foundation, visit www.verizon.com/foundation.

A Dow 30 company, Verizon Communications (NYSE:VZ) is one of the world's leading providers of communications services, with approximately \$68 billion in annual revenues. Verizon companies are the largest providers of wireline and wireless communications in the United States. Verizon is also the largest directory publisher in the world, as measured by directory titles and circulation. Verizon's international presence includes wireline and wireless communications operations and investments, primarily in the Americas and Europe. For more information, visit www.verizon.com.

"If you are with the press and would like to cover Oregon Literacy in any way, or would like to submit a story please contact Jon Toorock at 503-244-3898 or jon@oregonliteracy.org."