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Grant Applications Available

Foundation Looking To Fund Cultural Endeavors

By Scott Nicholson

A variety of local cultural and conservation endeavors could see benefits from a local charitable trust fund.

The trustees of the Helen M. Clabough Charitable Foundation will soon be making their annual round of grant awards, and they're hoping to draw a variety of new applicants. The grants are available to groups or agencies working to preserve land in the area or tackling a project that preserves or promotes the area's cultural heritage.

The foundation was formed by Helen M. Clabough, who was a long-time Blowing Rock resident. Clabough was born in New York. Growing up, she developed a love of the theater. She became an ardent fan of the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. When her husband, Tom Clabough, died in 1990, she continued to pursue her love of nature and cultural activities. Before she died in 2001, she established a foundation in her name to further the environmental and cultural resources of the High Country.

"Helen liked to walk around Cone Manor," said Boone attorney Carole Spainhour, who is one of the foundation's trustees along with Frank Gibb and Marie Weingarten. "She wanted funds to assist in the preservation of that asset."

Applications for grants are taken through Feb. 1, and Spainhour said most projects that fall within the foundation's funding guidelines are approved. The mission statement of the foundation is "to promote and improve the conservancy and stewardship of the natural resources in Watauga, Ashe, Avery and Caldwell counties by aiding public and private organizations involved in such activities" and "to promote and foster the regional arts and cultural offerings of the High Country in the four-county area."

Among the first projects funded include grants for a land purchase near Tater Hill by the High Country Conservancy. The foundation provided money for a title search and other legal fees, and later helped acquire the McLean property, which is located on Winkler's Creek Road but is visible from and adjacent to the parkway. "That property had been in the same family since the 1930s and this made sure it was protected," Spainhour said.

The trustees meet twice a year and also stay in touch on the phone. While they have some repeat applicants, the trustees are hoping to see some fresh names in the next round of grants. Spainhour said the foundation has adopted an informal goal of distributing at least 10 percent of each year's money to a new applicant. It's also not a place to secure perpetual funding, Spainhour said. "We're not the people for funding annually," she said. "Our niche is to help get something started. Usually three years is the maximum we will fund something."

Other projects or groups receiving funding in the past include underwriting for summer camps at the Southern Appalachian Historical Association in Boone. "We got the cutest letters from those kids," Spainhour said.

The foundation helped provide equipment and training for a Blazing Saddles equine therapy program targeted to at-risk kids, provided a roof for a building at the Watauga Humane Society, and helped conservation efforts by the National Committee of the New River and the Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust. It also funded security improvements for an OASIS playground.

Spainhour described one such project where a modest investment yielded great community events. Mountain Home Music had no way to record their concerts and preserve them, so the Clabough Foundation chipped in money for recording equipment.



"It's not just land," Spainhour said. "We're interested in preserving the cultural heritage."

The trustees usually give out between \$50,000 and \$80,000 in grants each year, for a total of over a quarter million dollars since the foundation was formed in 2001. The individual grant awards can vary dramatically, usually from \$1,000 to \$25,000.

Spainhour said the trustees have a model for a program which was started in Greensboro. In the program, third grade students are assigned student aids who take the children to bookstores and help them select \$75 worth of books. A year later, the children get follow-up visits to see if the program was successful. Spainhour said Appalachian State University students could serve as a resource for the program. "Most kids don't have their own books unless their parents are interested in them," Spainhour said.

Grant applications can be found at the foundations Web site at www.claboughfoundation.org.

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