

06/24/08

Eureka foundation hires first director

By Nathan Donato-Weinstein

The Eureka Schools Foundation last week announced it was tapping a public relations veteran to become the first paid executive director in the group's history.

Julie Guerrero of Roseville was selected by a six-member committee to head up the foundation, which raises money for enrichment programs in the Eureka Union School District, officials said.

Guerrero, who will begin the part-time job in July, will take the lead in ramping up corporate sponsorships and community donations. She will also be responsible for overseeing a myriad of fundraising activities, officials said.

Until now, the group has organized several community fundraising events – including a golf tournament, home tour, auction and annual giving campaign – entirely through volunteer support. It has raised \$1.9 million over its 12-year history, according to ESF, with funds going to library resources, music and art education, technology equipment and more.

Having a paid staff member will allow the group to take fundraising "to the next level," ESF Board Member Tiffany Jones said, though it will continue to rely on volunteers as well. The organization will join an elite group of K-12 foundations served by some kind of paid staff.

"Our foundation has been in place now for several years, and we are just to a place where we need to have a dedicated person helping us in some of these areas," she said.

Jones said Guerrero impressed ESF board members with a resume that includes PR, marketing and event-planning experience. She also brings a wealth of knowledge developing business relationships, she said.

"During economic times like this it's hard to get folks to write checks," Jones said. "How we counteract that as a foundation is to keep our communications strong and consistent."

Guerrero, 38, worked in public relations for a Bay Area agency, then took on top PR duties for tech startup Commerce One. She most recently served as a business relationship manager for Placer Title in Lincoln.

In an interview, Guerrero said she was attracted to the Eureka job for the chance to put her skills to work for an organization she believes in.

“I really looked at where I wanted the next phase of my career to go, and what excites me most is having a personal stake in something,” Guerrero said. “I’m just really excited about it.”

ESF’s importance to the district is likely to grow, as state budget cuts make funding for enrichment more tenuous. Not that ESF is reducing its offerings. On the contrary, it hopes to start an after-school Spanish language enrichment program for all kindergarten- through fifth-grade students who want it.

As if to highlight the relationship between ESF and the district, Guerrero will work out of an office at the Eureka district office – the first time ESF has had a formal presence there.

“Basically, we felt like in order to meet needs of parents and students this was a necessary next step for our foundation,” Jones said.

Guerrero said her priorities will include an expanded presence for ESF at back to school nights and building awareness about ESF’s role in the larger community.

About 40 percent of K-12 districts are served by some kind of foundation, according to the National School Foundations Association. Of those, 25 to 30 percent have paid staff.