

Blessings from Ballantyne

Rea Village resident offers 'Answer' to struggling moms through grassroots scholarship program

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Samantha Sabin - Carolina Weekly



Photo courtesy of Susan Andersen

(From left) Answer Scholarship Endowment founder Susan Andersen, scholarship recipient - Marie Dingle and ASE mentor Glenda Manning.

Congestive heart failure and her daughter's severe asthma crumbled Anita Cherry's dreams of a college degree. To better her child's life, Cherry wanted to earn a college degree, but each month she discovered the bulk of her paycheck went to pay her medical expenses.

With the help of the Answer Scholarship Endowment, Cherry finally received the college diploma she only could dream about. Last December, she graduated from Pfeiffer University with a bachelor's degree in business administration and management information systems. Now she spends her days working as an accounts payable specialist for Baker & Taylor, a book distribution company.

"That scholarship meant a lot to me," said Cherry.

Answer Scholarship Endowment, a grassroots scholarship program, is the brainchild of Ballantyne resident Susan Andersen.

"In the back of my mind I always had thoughts to give back to the community and local women," Andersen said.

When she was a senior in high school, Anderson's parents divorced. As a result, money was scarce. Andersen was alone in her search for college funding until the Charlotte Association of Insurance Women offered her a partial, four-year scholarship. Because of the nonprofit's benevolence, she went on to achieve her dream, graduating from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Understanding how blessed she was to see her goal of graduating college

realized, Andersen said she vowed to one day be in a position to help others achieve the same goals.

In 2005, after she and her husband ended their 22-year marriage, Andersen was a single parent raising two teenagers. Thankfully, the Rea Village resident added, she wasn't like many single parents since she wasn't financially strapped.

Plenty of single Charlotte mothers have that worry, Andersen said. Realizing other moms' need for financial help, Andersen committed to helping single mothers earn their college degrees.

Now, more than ever, Andersen said, she felt it was time for her to make good on her promise to help women graduate from college.

"I decided to use my sorrow (from the divorce) and make something positive with it," said Andersen. "I wanted to help women in my city."

The next year, the Answer Scholarship Endowment was born. The fund grants scholarships to mothers in Mecklenburg County and surrounding areas so they can earn college degrees while raising their children.

"By helping a mother, you're helping the entire family," Andersen explained. "It is my passion to help these women."

Scholarships are awarded to single mothers who are U.S. citizens residing in North or South Carolina. To be eligible, applicants must be seeking their first degree and be enrolled or planning to enroll as full-time, degree-seeking students at an accredited regional institution. Scholarship amounts vary annually at the discretion of the Answer Scholarship Endowment committee, but usually range from \$1,200 to \$4,000. Although the scholarships are issued for one year, they can be renewed if funds are available and satisfactory performance is maintained.

The Answer Scholarship Endowment is housed at Foundation for the Carolinas, a nonprofit corporation that encourages innovative community initiatives and quality services for the people.

"It's so exciting to see what these women can do with a little help," said Andersen, noting during tough economic times it's more important than ever to help struggling moms earn their degrees. "We're seeing them achieve more while their children learn about the power of education."

Andersen now is taking the next step and raising funds from others to ensure the Answer Scholarship Endowment is a permanent force to help women in the region and that each recipient can complete her educational goals through four years of college. So far, Answer Scholarship Endowment is the only scholarship of its kind available to local moms.

"I'm looking for people who have a passion for education," said Andersen.

The Answer Scholarship Endowment has set a goal for the year to raise \$20,000 in donations. If the goal is achieved, the endowment will be able to afford to supplement one additional renewable scholarship.

Being an endowment means that the scholarship will continue to help single mothers even after Andersen is gone. To stabilize the scholarship, Answer needs the community's support, said Andersen. "By helping a mother, you are helping the entire family. With this gift, you can help local women break the cycle of reliance on government programs for financial assistance."

Want to help?

People interested in making a donation to Answer Scholarship Endowment can send checks, made payable to Answer Scholarship, to Foundation for the Carolinas, 217 S. Tryon St., Charlotte, NC 28202.