

Thomas Foundation could provide scholarships to HSCHS students

by Joe Sovo

Susan Thomas has carried the torch of the Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation for the last five years and continues to promote scholarships for prospective college students. Susan and her late husband, former U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas were advocates of college education opportunities for high school students while Craig served in the Senate, and she is carrying on that tradition through work with the foundation.

Thomas was in Thermopolis recently to visit with Hot Springs County High School students, along with principal Travis Anderson and counselor Cortney Thoren. It was the first true exposure to the goals and accomplishments of the non-profit Thomas Foundation for Anderson and Thoren.

"I was impressed with her and her energy and dedication to at-risk students to get a quality education," Anderson said. "There's a value set on education in Wyoming. So many kids can get help. It's amazing that Wyoming has that (opportunity).

"We're not just looking for students to help them (educationally) but to help them be a better person... It's separating discipline from academics, building a system to meet their (students') needs and giving them ownership of their learning."

After Susan Thomas' visit, Anderson said Thoren was assigned to go through all the HSCHS seniors' transcripts in order to determine for which college scholarships they can qualify. They discussed how they were going to partner with the Thomas Foundation.

Thomas noted that no Thermopolis high school student had received a Thomas Foundation scholarship in the first five years of the foundation's existence.

"She (Thomas) was very adamant that she wants to help a student from Hot Springs County High School," Anderson said after his visit with her. "We'll see which students qualify."

Anderson said he would make recommendations

of HSCHS students who qualify to Thomas by late February or early March. He said a number of students had already met with Thoren to apply for college scholarships. Student applications are due by May 1 for the 2013-14 school year.

"It really energized me visiting with her," Anderson said of Thomas, and he wants to partner with Thomas and her foundation "down the road" as well.

Thomas Foundation background

Susan Thomas established the Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation in 2008, about a year after Craig died of leukemia.

"I wanted to keep his legacy going," Susan said. "He loved kids."

The Thomas Foundation has grown into a mentoring program with a scholarship component over its first five years.

"I know that a learner who is at-risk doesn't necessarily come to the table with similar knowledge, ability, self-advocacy skills, social maturity or clarity of purpose as others," Thomas writes in her newsletter. "And simply getting into college or a trade school doesn't change that. That is why we established this non-profit charity."

Thomas spoke about leadership awards during her visit to Thermopolis.

"It's not the traditional teaching model," she said. "It's starting to catch on statewide...It takes new innovators who are willing to step out of the box."

Thomas indicated she has increased the dollar amount of scholarships to the University of Wyoming, going to \$1,300 per semester for full-time and \$675 per semester for part-time students, starting in the fall of 2013. At this time, the Thomas Foundation is granting 14 scholarships per semester, and Thomas is mentoring all the scholarship recipients.

"I believe in responsibility and accountability," she said of students. "The principal (Anderson) and counselor (Thoren) here are right on target. They believe everyone can succeed and I love that."



Susan Thomas, representing the Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation, is flanked by Hot Springs County High School principal Travis Anderson, right, and counselor Cortney Thoren during Thomas' visit to Thermopolis.

- Joe Sova photo