

Thomas Foundation gives scholarships to those at-risk in honor of late senator

By JAMI FORD
Staff Writer

Susan Thomas is working hard to provide opportunities for at-risk youths of Wyoming through her work in The Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation.

The foundation started because of late Senator Thomas' love of young people.

According to Susan Thomas, Craig would travel the state meeting with youths to inspire leadership in them.

Susan herself is a former teacher of at-risk youths, and the formation of the foundation combines Susan and Craig's interests and passion for improving the lives of others.

In the beginning the foundation was set up to use leftover campaign money.

"The work of the foundation is three fold," Susan said.

The scholarship portion of the foundation is designed to fulfill an unmet need. Many young people are struggling students who are not eligible for Hathaway Scholarships. Susan stresses, however, that the scholarship opportunity is not only for recent graduates.

"The first person to receive a scholarship under the foundation was a 39-year-old," Susan said. "The scholarship enabled her to complete her program in cosmetology that she had already started."

With only a few credits standing between the first recipient and her future the scholarship was able to open doors for her.

Scholarships are awarded one semester at a time.

Recipients must report back to Susan with their grades and progress in order to continue to receive scholarships in subsequent semesters. "Accountability was important to Craig," Susan said, emphasizing the importance of including

these standards in the scholarship program.

The accountability process is also intended to help keep recipients from falling through the cracks by giving continued involvement from those working in the foundation.

"We mentor scholarship recipients so they have the best chance of succeeding," Susan said.

Thirteen scholarships were awarded in the first semester of the program.

Twelve new scholarship recipients will be selected for the semester starting in January.

Scholarships are not restricted to attending the University of Wyoming or Wyoming's community colleges.

Opportunities are also available for those who wish to attend vocational education programs for professions like driving, mechanics, culinary arts, cosmetology and health services. The average scholarship amount awarded by the foundation is \$1,250 per semester.

Another facet of the foundation is in the form of grants awarded to groups and institutions in Wyoming working to help at-risk youths.

Groups like the Boys and Girls Club and the Army National Guard Youth Foundation work hard to reduce the risk for at-risk youths, and Susan stresses the importance of helping other organizations as well.

The third portion of the program is in the form of yearly leadership awards. The purpose of these awards is to offer support and encourage professionals focusing on at-risk youth. In addition to recognition recipients receive an award of \$2,500. Craig Falkman of Gillette accepted the first of these awards in August, for going above and beyond the call of duty in helping young people with substance abuse problems.

"I have about 50 applications for the up-



SUSAN THOMAS WATCHES as program scholarship recipient Hana Collins styles the hair of Priscilla Payne.

coming scholarships," Thomas said. "Unfortunately we only have 12 open slots for new applicants, and it's very hard to have to turn anyone down."

Anyone interested in learning more about the foundation, scholarship opportunities or

to recommend someone for a leadership award should visit the Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation web site at www.Thomas-Foundation.com, send e-mail to CraigandSusanThomas-Foundation@Bresnan.net, call (307) 634-8195 or write to the foundation at 2780 Olive Drive, Cheyenne, WY 82001.