

Thomas foundation aids youths

Late senator's wife continues mission of giving at-risk kids a second chance.

By Angus M. Thuermer Jr.

As U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas worked Capitol Hill for residents of Wyoming, his wife, Susan, spent several days a week working with at-risk youth in the Washington, D.C., area.

It was part of her life mission, something she had been doing for 36 years, although most of it in the Equality State. She would take her students, who had no idea she was a senator's wife, to the Capitol to meet Thomas and his colleagues, revelling in the contrast, wonder and fulfillment such excursions would produce.

After her husband died of leukemia last year, she used the remainder of his campaign funds to launch a foundation to help at-risk youth.

"This is a natural," she said of her interest in continuing her life mission.

Understanding that many children who do not do well in school can still be educated, even if it takes extra help, The Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation offers scholarships to such aspiring students.

"We can't let life fence out an eager mind from better educational opportunities," the foundation says in describing its mission. "These young citizens have ability, but for some



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Former U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas had an interest in youths and knew the importance of education, his wife said.

reason have not been able to get back up on that horse after falling off."

Leadership awards and grants to institutions also are part of the program.

In Jackson recently to promote her cause, Susan Thomas said Teton County is the only of Wyoming's 23 counties from which she has not had an application for a scholarship.

"That's why I'm up here meeting the Community Foundation," she said.

Scholarships help students obtain everything from a high-school equivalency diploma to a college education, Thomas said. Students who receive aid must attend school

in Wyoming.

Applicants can get more than \$1,000 a semester, but those who receive Hathaway Scholarships from the state do not qualify. A one-semester scholarship limit at a time is a method Thomas uses to keep her recipients on task.

To receive funding for the next semester, students have to prove they did well with their first scholarship.

"They have to be acceptable," Thomas said. "They have to re-up."

Under her supervision.

"I mentor and monitor each one personally," she said.

Society will live with all its members and be responsible for them whether they are realizing their potential or not, Thomas said.

"We're going to pay now or pay later," she said of the cost of at-risk youth. "I want to pay now."

Thomas said her husband took an interest in youth and knew the importance of education, especially for those who don't excel in school or even fit in.

"I think Craig would be very proud of this," she said.

People who want to know more about the foundation or its programs can e-mail Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation@Bresnan.net or visit ThomasFoundation.com. The foundation mailing address is 2780 Olive Drive, Cheyenne, WY 82001, and its phone number is 307-634-8159.

The foundation is a tax-exempt charity under IRS Code section 501(c)(3).