

# Thomas Foundation creating new path to education

By Andrew Setterholm

**PINEDALE** – For many Wyoming high school students, Hathaway scholarships are a ticket to post-secondary education. For others, though, the specific course path and strict eligibility requirements put the Hathaway funding out of reach. These are the students Susan Thomas hopes to serve with the Craig

and Susan Thomas Foundation scholarship. Founded in 2008, the Thomas Foundation aims to assist at-risk students in attending post-secondary schools in Wyoming. Susan Thomas, a decorated and experienced educator, created the foundation in honor of her late husband, U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas, also a dedicated proponent of quality education.

Susan Thomas visited Pinedale and Big Piney high schools Monday to speak with counselors Molly Mulcahy and Norma Clements and college advisor Alexandra Edwards.

Thomas presented information on the scholarship, which provides \$1,250 per semester for 14 Wyoming students. The only requirements to qualify for the scholarship are a high school diploma, GED, eligibility for the program to which a student is applying, having no Hathaway scholarship assistance and intent to attend a Wyoming post-secondary program.

Preference is given to students who are “at-risk.” Thomas explained Monday her opinion that students who qualify for the Hathaway scholarship and other financial aid are already on their way to success; her foundation focuses on students who might not have been on a post-secondary track through their high school careers.

“Every student has value and worth,” Thomas said. “It’s important to give them the opportunity to grow, to succeed and to continue. They can do it, and I want to help them do it.”

A unique component of the Thomas Foundation is its mentoring program. The foundation does not simply award financial aid, it

also establishes a close relationship with each student that receives a scholarship. Students are expected to meet specific academic requirements while on a Thomas Foundation scholarship and Thomas personally mentors each student as they progress.

“Upon agreeing to our terms, I start to work individually with each student to make sure he [or] she is responsible, accountable, and willing to grow, to learn, to try to become the best citizen possible,” Thomas wrote in the Thomas Foundation newsletter.

Edwards, who serves as college advisor for Pinedale and Big Piney students, said Thomas’s mentoring is a part of what sets the scholarship apart from others.

“Not only do the students then receive financial support but they also receive emotional support, both of which are crucial to successfully completing a college education,” Edwards said.

Aside from the emotional support students can receive, the Thomas scholarship allows students who might not have thought they were college-eligible realize that opportunity.

“Many of our low-income students do not pursue post-secondary education because of the financial burden it will be on them and on

their families. Scholarships like the Thomas scholarship help students to realize that they can go to college and they can be successful there,” Edwards said.

Since its inception, the Thomas Foundation has helped more than 50 students attend post-secondary programs at every Wyoming community college, several trade schools and the university.

In 2010, Big Piney High School graduate Dusty Cates was awarded the scholarship and is currently pursuing a career in the

automotive industry. The foundation also supports organizations and individuals making a difference for at-risk students. In its five-year span, the foundation has donated more than \$37,000 to 28 different groups in the state.

Thomas’s focus remains on students and maintaining the personal relationships through mentoring that help them succeed.

“We’ve worked hard to make it for the students. I believe so strongly in these students,” she said.

More information on the foundation is available online at [www.Thomas-Foundation.com](http://www.Thomas-Foundation.com), and Pinedale and Big Piney high schools have application materials available for students interested in the scholarship. ■

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Thomas Foundation Courtesy photo

**Big Piney High School graduate Dustin Cates studies automotive technology at Western Wyoming Community College with help from the Thomas Foundation.**

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