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Theater arts group gets \$5k gift from fund

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MILFORD – A unique theater-arts program run by the Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley has become the benefactor of a sizeable grant from the Nancy O Fund, a foundation named in honor of Nancy Ogradowczyk, a local dance, theater and singing instructor who died unexpectedly in April 1994 on the day before her 27th birthday.

The program, called Riverbend Youth Company, received \$5,000 from the fund, which is administered by the Nashua Region of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.

"We're thrilled to have the support of the Nancy O Fund," said Dave Parker, the Souhegan Valley club's chief professional officer. "Our program is all about providing kids in our community with hope and opportunity, (especially) kids who may not join traditional programs."

Established in 2006, Riverbend uses theater arts programs to encourage personal growth and development among its students, Parker said.

"(Offering kids) a creative, positive outlet for expression in a safe and caring environment . . . results in a reduction of negative behaviors and an increase in self-esteem," he added.

Although just two years old, Riverbend has already received numerous accolades, including endorsement as an extended learning opportunity by the state Board of Education and a merit award for program excellence from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, according to Souhegan Valley resource development director Susan Taylor.

Shortly after Nancy Ogradowczyk's death, which resulted from complications from her longtime asthma condition, her parents, John and Diane Ogradowczyk, started the fund to help needy children afford lessons and find opportunities in the performing arts. Besides her involvement in dance and theater instruction, Nancy was also a French teacher at Souhegan High School in Amherst.

John Ogradowczyk, an accomplished singer/songwriter best known for his Irish ballads and folk songs, has performed numerous concerts to benefit his daughter's fund. Upon the 10th anniversary of her passing in 2004, he released a CD titled "Ireland in My Heart" as a tribute to his daughter.

Anyone wishing to contribute to the fund can send donations to The Nancy O Fund, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, 37 Pleasant St., Concord, 03301.

For more information on the Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley and its programs, contact Susan Taylor at 672-1002, ext. 15, or staylor@svbgc.org or visit www.svbgc.org.

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