

**BECON**  
**December 8, 2023**

We had a busy morning and a delicious breakfast of Egg McMuffins (better than McD's for sure). There were several guests.

Jeff Roach brought his wife Sherry (excuse spelling if incorrect) and friend Mith Geissinger.

Brett Arnold from the Heights club and District President Elect was a guest of Cavins.

Chris Mitzman from the West End club came to breakfast and told us about the club's upcoming Santa Party. It will be held tomorrow, Saturday 12/9 at 7pm. The event will be at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center and will feature the band El Wencho.

Our speakers this morning were from the Billings Public Schools Education Foundation. More on that later.

**Announcements**

Bill Kennedy gave us an update on the recently held Festival of Trees. He said they hit their gross revenue goal of \$200,000. It was a full house at the Gala with 400 attendees. Friday and Saturday were also very well attended. Bill gave Thanks to all who helped and attended the event and Thanked Sheila Wilson for her exceptional work decorating the facility. One tree was constructed of children's books. This tree was auctioned off for \$5000 by an anonymous buyer. They donated the tree to the Billings Education Foundation.

The Senior Lights tour was a big success and made 2 buses of seniors very happy. The event went off without any problems. Special thanks went out from President Craig to Stephanie and Rob Romsa, Brynn Schwarz and Rene Critelli.

We received a thank you card from the American Legion for our donation of \$4000 for Thankful Giving. The Legion was able to purchase 150 turkeys to give away. Somehow we got a rebate from the American Legion on this deal. Not sure how that happened because I was busy writing.

Craig told me that we will have breakfast on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. I was hoping to get out of this duty but no such luck. Speaking of that next week's meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> will be our Christmas breakfast. Tony is looking for items to give away. Please let him know if you have any door prizes.

Kim Lewis told us that the United Way will hold a Homeless Community Discussion on Thursday December 14<sup>th</sup> from 10 am to noon. It will be at their facility. They are going to discuss ways to use the \$2.5 million gift from Jeff Bezos.

## **Speaker**

Our member Shannon Christensen introduced our speakers. Shannon is the Board President for the Billings Education Foundation. She was accompanied by Kelly McCandless, Executive Director and Shelley Pierce, Development and Community Relations Manager.

The Mission of the Foundation is to provide support to educators and students through philanthropy, connection, and collaboration. We strive to give all students the tools they need to reach their greatest potential and to develop into engaged and productive citizens. It was incorporated in 1988 by concerned citizens and is governed by a volunteer board. The foundation works in partnership with SD2 and gets no funding from the district.

The Foundation Programs are:

**Classroom Investment** – Directly enhancing the learning environment by providing much-needed resources and materials that may not be available within the school budget.

**Scholarships** – Encouraging academic excellence to further student and education achievements. They give out 22 scholarships to high school seniors.

**Reading Rocks** – Addressing the “summer slide” by providing reading support to students. They go to Billings Parks during the summer to hand out books. About 6000 books are typically given out. *BEC contributed \$3500 to this program in 2023.*

**BackPack Meals & School Pantries** – Providing nutritious food to students who face food insecurity. Feeding 800+ students per week. Backpacks are discreetly given out on Friday with food so that kids have something to eat on the weekend. *BEC donated \$4000 to this program in 2023.*

**Angel Fund Endowment and Little Angel Fund** – Assisting students with basic services to help them stay in school (i.e. transportation, school fees, warm clothing, vision, or dental needs)

**SD2 Homeless Fund** – Supporting basic needs for identified homeless students to help them attend and thrive in school. 600 kids have been identified as homeless in the SD2.

Funding is accomplished by private donations, grants and other activities. One is Saturday Live that is held in September at Pioneer Park. They are also having a raffle for a new Chevy Equinox. The drawing is today at 9:30am. Ed Kaufman has a ticket. Did you win, Ed?

Here are some numbers that the Foundation group shared with us:

\$104,000	in Classroom grants supporting 160 classrooms
5000+	books given away during Reading Rocks over 6 weeks
8	Educator Scholarships Awarded
22	Student Scholarships Awarded
\$86,000+	raised for more than 45 groups, schools and teams through the SUV raffle
\$49,000	raised for schools through Saturday Live
800-1000	students fed each week through the Foundations Food Insecurity Programs

After the meeting Al Jones sent me a list of donations that BEC has made to the schools over the years. Al said, "I'm sure I'm forgetting some, overall it looks like a half million dollars roughly".

- BEC past investments in School District 2 (we've contributed to other schools as well like Central, Elysian, Huntley, Shepherd, Laurel, Lockwood, and more.)
- Youth of the Year Scholarships at \$1500-2,500 each for 35+ years (Senior, West, and Central originally) so at least a \$100,000.
- STEM events funding (Odyssey of the Mind, Robotics, Rocket Club, others)
- Playground equipment at Orchard, Garfield, Newman,
- Sciences & Tech classes' Greenhouses at Will James and Riverside Middle Schools
- Freedom Shrines at all schools at \$3-10,000k
- SD2's Parenting Education program for many years
- Trading Cards anti-drug program-high schools partnered with elem. Schools
- Anti-violence curriculums-all schools from Family Tree/Second Step and Courtesy & Respect Education
- Angel Funds at the high schools
- Salvation Army Dress A Child for elementary students, over \$200k
- Food backpacks funding
- School Resource Officers training
- Saturday Live early funding
- Senior Graduation Parties at the high schools

Thanks for putting this together, Al.

Until next time,

Dave