

# The Lake Rabun Foundation

## 2019 Spring Flyer

Welcome back to the lake for the summer folk as another season begins. There is a timelessness that comes with reconnecting with neighbors, cleaning up the house after winter, hosting the inevitable guests, and reestablishing the summer traditions that are uniquely yours and your families.

The LRF has had a busy off season, and with the contributions from our Annual Fund and lake fundraisers, is committed to an even more active role in “giving back” to the local community.

Our student scholarship program is the flagship of the Foundation so I will take a minute to fully explain just how the selection process transpires. Believe me when I say that Anne Pledger leaves nothing to chance as regards the process utilized by the LRF selection committee.

First A Little History:

During the mid-80's the 250-member Lake Rabun Association was deeply concerned. The lake had been threatened twice in three years by local owner/developers who intended to build multi-use and multifamily facilities along with a commercial marina. The developments had to be approved via the county commissioners so our efforts were focused on that group. On both occasions the LRA officers and the general membership rose to the challenge of preserving Lake Rabun by keeping it zoned for single family homes.

The leaders of the effort are owed a debt of gratitude as the proposed rezoning could have drastically altered the complexion of Lake Rabun. The full story and the LRA's grassroots resistance is told in detail in the Centennial Volume. We were lucky to have a talented bunch of lawyers and volunteers who gave so generously of their time and resources to preserve Lake Rabun as originally intended.

With the immediate threats neutralized in 1986 the LRA President, Pete Halter, in discussing the near “Lake Laniering” of our lake with Buz Stone, the immediate Past-President, suggested that the LRA should consider sponsoring college scholarships for local Rabun County students. The preceding years battles with the county commissioners had convinced Pete, Buz, and other lake visionaries that an LRA attuned to county issues relevant to our lake was going to be a necessity moving forward.

Pete and Buz enlisted the support of Phil Hudgins, the editor of the Clayton Tribune, who pledged a \$500 technical school scholarship. Along with the LRA's offer of one scholarship for \$1000, Pete, Buz and Phil set up a meeting with the RCHS Principal and the Lake Rabun Fund (later to be the Lake Rabun Foundation) was born! The first LRA Student Scholarship of \$1000 was awarded in 1987 to Melanie Deitz who attended UGA and still resides in Rabun County.

As the Foundation expanded in form and function, stories of exceptional volunteerism emerged. Most of the founders and their families are still active on the lake...still contributing over the decades.

### Student Selection Process:

Students applying for scholarships fill out a standard application form which is used by all of the entities awarding scholarships...about 75 students at RCHS applied this year out of a class of approximately 138.

In March, Steve Raeber, Buz Stone and Pat Clay, former RCHS teacher, go to the high school and review all the student applications.

From the 75 plus applications 16-18 students from RCHS and several students from Rabun Gap Nacoochee are chosen to be interviewed. The board of the LRF has previously determined that nine students from RCHS and one student from Rabun Gap will be awarded scholarships. Effective 2019, our four-year scholarships will be \$2,500 each year...a \$500 increase from previous years.

A rotating team of LRF officers and LRA members interview the students...typically in one fairly long day. Steve, Anne, and now Laura Rhodes, who is taking over the Connections Program, are standing interviewers along with two rotating LRA members. There are also two guidance counselors and two teachers who attend and offer their insight.

As an aside, I was tremendously impressed by the RCHS faculty who attended this year. They were obviously proud of these kids and had a personal stake in their lives. In most cases they had detailed family, academic, and extracurricular knowledge of all of the interviewees.

Lastly, after the final interview, the LRF team and the school representatives discuss and select our scholarship recipients...not an easy task as all of these students are worthy! There are seven votes...three from the LRF contingent and four from the RCHS reps. (IRS regulations require that the school have more voting members on the interview team than the donor organization. In reality, the decisions are all made by consensus.

The process is facilitated by all of Anne's work in providing complete bio's, summaries of academic credentials, and financial info on each student. There are also forms to be completed and signed from the North Georgia Community Foundation (NGCF) so that we remain in compliance with IRS regulations. All the paperwork is then sent to NGCF who executes the details of the scholarships awarded.

### Selection Criteria:

We are told that our scholarships are the most prestigious awarded. Unlike most scholarships, the Lake Rabun Foundation Scholarships are for four years and are additionally at the high end of the financial scale. This year there were more than 58 entities that awarded scholarships to Rabun County High School students. Most of those were one-time awards for \$1,000 or less. There is a subjective factor in the process which includes the following criteria:

#### Financial Need:

The school provides some guidance and a rating of 1 or 2 for each student with a "1" signifying the most need. The school members of the interview team also let us know about significant contributing factors like family health issues, parental status, other scholarships received, special needs of siblings, etc.....The scholarships are not awarded solely on need, but it is an important factor.

#### Academic Achievement and Extracurriculars:

Grades, test scores and AP and college level courses are reviewed. Anne prepares a one-page spreadsheet of all the scholastic achievements of the students. All of the students outside scholastic, club, and athletic achievements are listed.

#### Character:

Consideration is given to letters of recommendation and input from the high school staff and other community sources. Included are recommendations from LRA members, church pastors, coaches, employers, and faculty members.

#### Community Service:

Outside RCHS activities like after school jobs, community volunteer work, and what the students do in their spare time are considered.

All of the information is taken into account but how a student presents themselves, shares his or her passions, dreams, goals and aspirations is important. There are stories of accomplishment in the face of real adversity that leave one with sheer admiration...one young man (the only one I believe who showed up in a coat and tie) was raised from infancy by his now 73 year old grandmother, who was a 1975 immigrant from Russia supporting the family as a waitress. I think everyone can imagine some of the hardships endured by the students. Remember that roughly 65% of the students in the Rabun County public school system participate in the free and reduced-price lunch program.

#### IN CLOSING:

The LRA has contributed over one million dollars to our student scholarship fund. There is a reservoir of goodwill created in this community as hopefully many (if not most) of our students return to live and work here. Our contributions to other local outreach programs is budgeted at \$45,000 this year. A list of the charities we support can be found on the LRA website.

We can all be proud of our efforts which have and continue to have such a positive impact on so many in Rabun County.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dick Newkirk