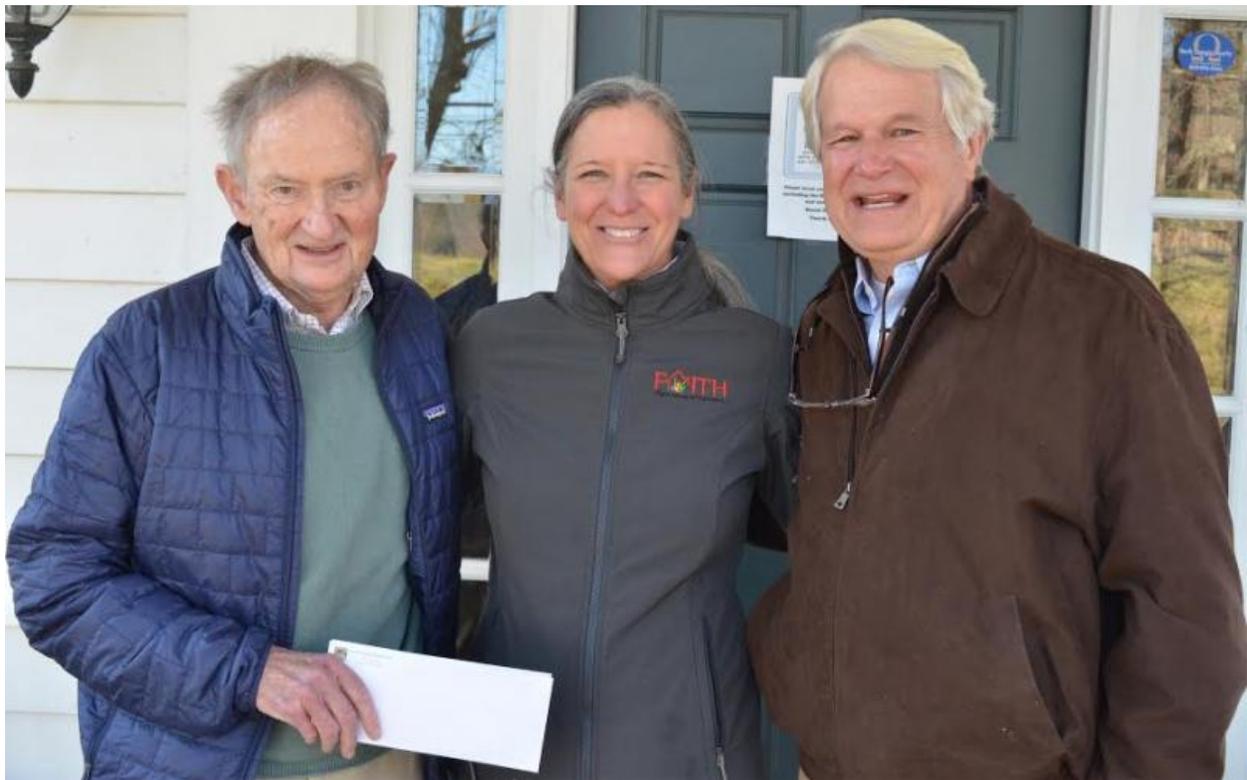


The Clayton Tribune

Lake Rabun group tops \$2 million in local giving

By Wayne Knuckles on Wednesday, March 10, 2021



Wayne Knuckles/The Clayton Tribune. Lake Rabun Foundation Executive Director Steve Raeber, left, and Director Emeritus Buz Stone, right, present a check for \$10,000 to Fight Abuse in the Home (FAITH) Executive Director Caroline Wallis Monday. The contribution put the LRF's total giving to Rabun County at over \$2 million.

CLAYTON—In 1987, a group of families living on Lake Rabun decided to take an active role in the community.

They started small, giving out their first \$1,000 college scholarship to a Rabun County student.

This week, the Lake Rabun Foundation (LRA) made a \$10,000 donation to Fight Abuse In The Home (FAITH).

That check put the LRA over \$2 million in contributions to Rabun County people and causes.

“Last year we made grants to 34 local entities involved in education, child welfare, food ministries and community development” said Steve Raeber, Executive Director of the LRA. “Rabun Family Connections was the major recipient last year. They also received a matching grant from the North Georgia Community Foundation, which handles our funds.”

Not bad for a group that was originally formed to mend fences over a zoning dispute.

“When we tried to generate some local support, we found out we didn’t have any,” recalled Buz Stone of LRA’s beginnings. “So in order to address that, we started to do things to be better neighbors and more a part of the community.”

Stone created the program and continues to serve as its Director Emeritus.

In addition to monetary contributions, LRA members serve on various local boards. “It’s really neat that our folks are so involved in the community,” Raeber said.

From their initial \$1,000 scholarship, the LRA has given out 185 college scholarships to date to Rabun County students with a value of \$1.3 million. They award approximately 10-12 scholarships per year to Rabun County High School senior and one student from Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School from Rabun County.

“Last year we had 42 students in college, and each one of them gets \$2,500 a year as long as they stay in school and maintain their grades,” Raeber said. “On the one hand, \$2,500 doesn’t sound like a lot of money, but it’s \$10,000 over four years, and most of these students are going to school here in Georgia, where they have the HOPE scholarship and so forth. Their gap need is about \$5-6 thousand, so \$2,500 is pretty significant.”

LRA has also established a fund at North Georgia Technical College for students from Rabun County. “Rabun students have so many opportunities there,” Raeber said. “They can request financial assistance for things like books, lab equipment, etc. from this fund.

“Buz Stone was in charge for over 25 years, and we continued to grow the scholarship program,” Raeber said. “Scholarships were a way to make a lasting impact in the community. We are great believers in education, and anything we can do that is of a lasting nature.”

Scholarship hopefuls are narrowed down to about 15 each year, and following a round of interviews, the finalists are selected.

“The bar is pretty high,” Raeber said. “We usually look at the top 30 students in grade point average in the class, and narrow it down from there. There are so many well qualified, deserving students. These are difficult, challenging and often emotional decisions in selecting the scholarship recipients.”

Another aspect of the program is the Connections Program. Laura Rhodes leads this program and finds a Lake Rabun family to "connect" with each scholarship recipient. "We want this to be more than a check being sent to their school," Raeber said. "This can be a great experience."

Guidance counselors Angie Addington and Sherrie Stockton provide much needed support and assistance, he added.

These programs have been funded by LRA events such as a Tour of Homes, the Rabun Ramble and other fundraisers which bring together hundreds of volunteers. Last year, with all events cancelled, LRA members generously supported the Foundation with contributions to the Annual Fund and a special Covid Relief Fund, Raeber said.

Raeber has been the executive director of the LRA for the past 8 years, and loves his work with the foundation.

"I feel blessed to have the job," he said. "I was slowing down business-wise and wondering what I was going to do. This is my new passion. We have a lot of people involved. People on the lakes care about it and enjoy it. Folks on Lake Rabun and all the lakes are trying to be good citizens and be part of the community. We try to give back and show that we are grateful for the chance to live in Rabun County. I'm blessed to have this opportunity."