

Couple creates endowment fund for struggling students

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By Edie Grossfield

The Post-Bulletin

A Rochester couple who are strong supporters of public education recently created an endowment fund that will benefit struggling students at Riverside Central Elementary School.

Norm and Char Hepper, who have been volunteering in Rochester public schools for about 13 years, created the fund. They declined to reveal the exact amount but said it will generate proceeds of between \$5,000 and \$6,000 annually for the school.

The money will provide academic help and enrichment activities for disadvantaged students at Riverside, the school with which the Heppers have been most involved.

"We've talked about this for a couple of years," Norm Hepper said. "Because each of us would see a child and wonder, if we could bring some extra help to bear, could it make a difference? The school is doing a lot, but they're doing all they can with the resources they have."

The assets of the new Char and Norm Hepper Riverside Elementary Donor Advised Fund will be managed by the Rochester Area Foundation, which also manages about 30 other funds.

Norm Hepper is a retired Mayo Clinic physician. The couple have lived in Rochester since Norm started at the clinic in 1951. Their three children attended Rochester public schools and Norm retired in 1990.

"They are a wonderful couple who have long been huge supporters of public education and Rochester public schools," said Ann Lynch, a Rochester School Board member and a board member of the Rochester Public School Foundation, which also was involved in the creation of the Hepper fund.

"They are icons around the halls at Riverside because they spend so much time there," Lynch said.

Riverside is one of the city's most diverse schools, and more than half its 657 students qualify for the district's free and reduced lunch program. About 120 students are in the English for Speakers of Other Languages program.

The Heppers spend two or three days a week at Riverside, including helping children with their homework in the After School Academy. Char enjoys helping students become better readers and Norm has spent much of his time tutoring students in mathematics.

The couple said they want their fund to benefit kids in grades three through five because "we've heard from the experts that these are the critical years," Norm said. "If they don't catch up at that point, they'll never catch up."

The Heppers said the fund will pay for academic assistance and activities above and beyond what the school budget provides, and teachers and administrators at Riverside will make the decisions about how the money is spent.

"Both Char and I have met students, and we just know they're capable of more than what they are doing ... that's the person we would like our funds to focus on," Norm said. "Some of these are children who, most of the time, for various reasons, some extra help can help them succeed."