



## UPPER FREEHOLD: Foundation in need of volunteers

By Jane Meggitt, Special Writer

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The Upper Freehold Regional Education Foundation (UFREF) is looking for a few good people — approximately 10, according to president James Derasmo.

The foundation's mission is to enhance the educational experience in township schools by providing donations and grants to teachers, administrators and students for facilitating educational opportunities.

"Our number of trustees are at an all-time low, as well as our level of volunteers and donors/sponsors," said Mr. Derasmo. "It takes a village to run a foundation and plan, host and conduct fundraising activities."

The foundation was also impacted by the recent death of Scott Smith, a founding member and trustee who served as treasurer.

"His dedication, optimism, and tremendous commitment were beyond reproach. Scott was a motivating force and was the glue that helped bind the trustees together and he was always focused on doing the right things for the kids of this community," according to Mr. Derasmo.

Mr. Derasmo added that he believes the foundation's inability to attract new and additional trustees is tied to the fact that everyone is busy.

"Due to the difficult economic climate, we find that both spouses are working these days, and people are very busy with activities that take up time during the week and on weekends," he said. "We also find that people are also tired from working so hard and doing things for work and for their immediate family — and a lot of people are saving more for that rainy day."

If 10 new trustees were added to the UFREF, that would result in an immediate lift from a diversity perspective, with new and fresh ideas, according to Mr. Derasmo. The foundation is looking for volunteers with backgrounds in grant writing, fundraising, finance and accounting, legal and marketing.

"You name it, and we can use that skill set," he said.

If the foundation had new trustees, it could generate new excitement and it could conduct its traditional 'signature' events — such as Sno-Ball Softball and Children's One-Mile Fun and 5K Run/Walk — as well as hold new and exciting fundraising events, according to Mr. Derasmo. The foundation recently announced it would be unable to hold its Sno-Ball Softball or 5K Community Fun Run/Walk this year.

"We could also continue to forge a partnership with the PTA on joint fundraising activities for targeted items," he said.

UFREF vice-president Sydney Guerrero agrees that the poor economy has deeply affected the organization.

"People are asked to do more with less income. Grass roots efforts such as ours suffer," he said. "People today are reluctant to add another commitment because they have no time available or are concerned that their job situation could turn any minute."

He said that all of the trustees have been affected one way or another. " If five to seven trustees, along with the support of the school board, the Upper Freehold Regional School District administration, [superintendent] Dr. Richard Fitzpatrick, the township and our local legislature, can raise and distribute over \$150,000 in grants, imagine what 10 to 15 could possibly accomplish," he said.

Mr. Guerrero said that this is a great community and the foundation firmly believes it will step up to the challenge to say that the steps and path forged by the UFREF will be followed and expanded upon.

"We need their help, their continued support, and their time. Many of the UFREF efforts allowed some eliminated programs to continue or have helped provide tools and technology to the schools from drawing tools, clubs, teleprompter, cameras, books, video cameras, to XBOX for fitness, and iPads," according to Mr. Guerrero. For more information on the foundation, visit the UFREF website at [www.ufref.org](http://www.ufref.org).

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