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## SUPPORTING YOUNG SCHOLARS

**CAREFREE KIWANIS GIVE ARIZONA CHILDREN AN EARLY START ON EDUCATION.**

STORY BY LORI ROBERTS

The Carefree Kiwanis Club in Arizona is doubling its efforts to help local needy children attend preschool. For the past couple years, the Carefree club has donated US\$10,000 annually to support preschool scholarships in Arizona’s Cave Creek Unified School District. When other donor money for the program dried up, Carefree Kiwanians increased the annual donation to \$20,000, effectively keeping the scholarships in business.

“I spoke very passionately for this project, because Kiwanis is all about students,” says Debbi Burdick, superintendent of Cave Creek Unified School District 93 and a Kiwanis club board member. “These are some of the students who are some of the neediest in our community. They’re typically in a one-parent family with a mom and no other support. If these moms didn’t have someone to take care of their children during the day, they would not be able to work and keep a roof over their heads.”

The Cave Creek school district, located north of Phoenix near Scottsdale, has only a handful of students

on free and reduced lunch programs. The overall wealthier profile means those children don’t qualify for state-supported programs to cover preschool costs. But they’re the very ones who stand to benefit most from a preschool education, says Jenny Stahl, an early childhood coordinator with Cave Creek.

The Kiwanis scholarships come from the club’s aptly named and child-focused Brilliant Futures program. Administered on an income-based sliding scale, the funds give parents ownership of their children’s education without bankrupting them.

“When (children) have a year or two in preschool, they are building those social and emotional skills, which are so important,” Stahl says.

Preschool tuition can run from \$311 to \$604 monthly,

depending on how many days the child attends during the week. This past year, the preschool offered scholarships to four children. This year, club members hope to double the number, providing parents with breathing room to work during the day and enjoy family bonding in the evenings.

“We want them to spend some quality time with their children when they come home,” Burdick says, explaining why they don’t require parents to work off their scholarships at school. “We’d rather they sit and read to their child.”

