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Gifts help group pass \$2 million in donations

By Nathan Max /h5>

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LINDA VISTA — A San Diego-based philanthropy group that has been providing grants to nonprofit organizations for more than a decade has hit a major milestone.

With this year's donations, the San Diego Women's Foundation has now given more than \$2 million since its founding in 2000, an achievement it commemorated during its 11th annual grants celebration Tuesday at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice. In 2011, the group is giving nearly \$182,000 to five San Diego County-based nonprofits.

"It's a significant milestone because it equates to substantial and sustainable impact, making San Diego an even better place to live for us all," Executive Director Tracy Johnson said. "We really believe that women can do more than (one) woman."

The San Diego Women's Foundation has 205 members, all of whom are required to contribute \$2,000 a year for five years. Each year, the group selects a focus and donates to organizations that represent that theme.

This year's focus is arts and culture. Other themes have included the environment, economic employment and development, civil society, education and health and human services.

The group will be giving \$50,000 to the San Diego Opera, \$45,000 to the San Diego Center for Children, \$32,000 to Eveoke Dance Theater, \$29,650 to Playwrights Project and \$25,000 to the California Center for the Arts Escondido.

San Diego Opera will use the money to fund its "Words and Music" program, in which professional musicians work with underprivileged high school and middle school kids to write their own operas. The 12-week program will be offered to students at Chula Vista High, Southwest High and a few other yet-to-be-determined schools.

The grant "will help us maintain the program," San Diego Opera General Director Ian Campbell said. The program "will reach a lot of schools that wouldn't ordinarily get this opportunity."

Playwright Projects is using its grant money to fund a writing program that will benefit middle school students in South County and East County. By the end, students in the program will submit a play that they wrote.

"It's going to have a tremendous impact in exposing kids to a genre of writing that they've really never had experience using before," said David Torres, principal at San Ysidro Middle School.

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