

Beloit woman donates \$1 million to PAPAS

By Ashley Rhodebeck

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To honor her late sister, the first theater teacher for Beloit Memorial High School, one 95-year-old Beloit woman donated \$1 million to benefit the school's auditoriums and students pursuing an education in the performing arts, PAPAS announced Saturday.

PAPAS, which stands for Parent Advocates for the Performing Arts in Our Schools, received \$750,000 while \$250,000 went to the Elizabeth Reinholz scholarship fund, which is operated by the Stateline Community Foundation.

Mildred "Lu" Ohlander received the money about a year ago as an unexpected inheritance.

Once a longtime California resident, Ohlander moved to the Stateline Area after her husband died in 2002 to be closer to her sister, Elizabeth "Betty" Reinholz. They lived in adjoining rooms at an assisted living facility.

Ohlander wanted to use the inheritance to honor Reinholz, who died in July 2005 at the age of 96. Because Reinholz taught theater and English at Beloit Memorial High for 26 years and was active in the Beloit Civic Theatre, it seemed fitting to use the money to benefit the performing arts.

When Reinholz's daughter contacted PAPAS Treasurer Loren Sass about the donation – the initial amount was \$250,000 – he thought, "That's a lot of money."

"How do you record a scream?" PAPAS Secretary Ann Sitrick said of his reaction.

The \$750,000 means a lot to the tax-exempt, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, which formed in 2005 to raise money for the condemned theater scenery rigging system. The

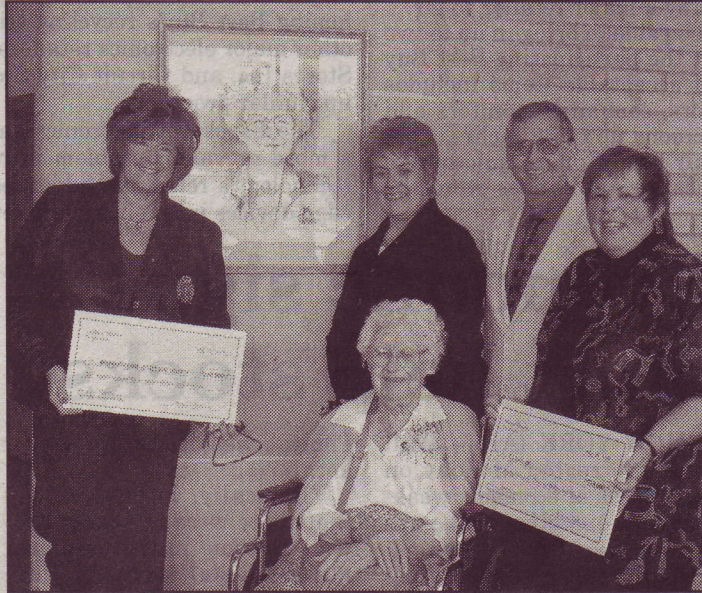


Photo provided

A large donation was given to PAPAS Saturday. From left are Stateline Community Foundation Executive Director Tara Tinder, PAPAS Secretary Ann Sitrick, PAPAS Treasurer Loren Sass, PAPAS President Vicki Jentoft-Johnson, and seated is Mildred "Lu" Ohlander.

group sold commemorative bricks, seat plaques and held several fundraisers. Their long-term plans included setting up an endowment, and Ohlander's donation has made it possible.

"It's happening a lot quicker than we ever anticipated," PAPAS President Vicki Jentoft-Johnson said.

Although the group learned about the donation well before Saturday's official announcement, Sass said the members are still absorbing the news. Seeing the amount in writing, Jentoft-Johnson said, "is like whoa."

It's tempting to get in the spending mindset, but Sitrick said the group wants to treat the donation as an enduring gift.

Thus, the group plans to complete only a few modifications to the theater this summer. The projects include upgrading the sound system,

upgrading the lighting and widening the door so a grand piano can be brought on stage and so it will be easier for large performing groups, such as the high school band, to move in and out.

Perhaps the most welcome improvement will be the installation of air conditioning in the main auditorium and little theater.

"It's just beastly in there," Sass said.

About 40 community organizations, such as the Beloit Janesville Symphony Orchestra, rent the auditorium each year, Jentoft-Johnson said, so the improvements will benefit not just the school but also the community.

Sitrick noted Ohlander's donation is a wonderful gift for the city where she has found much happiness and, she said, "It's a wonderful compliment to the legacy Betty Reinholz left to the community."