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LEADORE TEACHER NEEDS PUBLIC TO VOTE FOR HIS DREAM IN SUPPORTING HIS SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

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(BOISE) – A Leadore teacher is hoping the public will vote for a dream project he’s proposing for his school as part of the Farmers Insurance Dream Big Teacher Grant program, which could benefit not only his school, but his entire community.

Kevin Ramsey teaches history, government and Spanish along with other assigned duties, and is also the technology coordinator at the South Lemhi School District #292 Jr./Sr. High School in Leadore. He has been named as a finalist in the Farmers Insurance program that supports teacher projects. Potentially, he could win a \$100,000 grant prize for his school. Voting opens Oct. 1. To view details, go to www.thankamericasteachers.com. Supporters can vote once per day per email during the month for proposals they believe will have a positive impact on students. Ramsey is the only Idaho finalist and hopes to be one of the six winners named from the 15 finalists.

Ramsey is proposing Project STRIVE (Students Training Researching and Innovating through Vocational Education). “I have always had a dream to build a program that would offer students the ability to incorporate knowledge from their core classes into student-led kinetic projects. These projects would be vocational in nature,” Ramsey said.

“When I came across the Farmers Insurance Dream Big Teacher Grant, I felt that this may be a way to help with my goal. I was hesitant to write for the grant because I felt that since it was such a large amount awarded, I really didn’t stand a chance in winning, especially considering the size of our school and surrounding community,” he said. Last year, a total of 85 students were enrolled, K-12, 27 of which attended the Jr./Sr. high school. Leadore itself is a town of barely more than 100 people located in the rural Lemhi Valley of east-central Idaho, south of Salmon.

Pushed by family and co-workers to pursue the Farmers grant, Ramsey said he’d never written for a grant this large before. Focusing on how the grant could “benefit the students, the district and the community as a whole,” he took the challenge.

“Taking this into consideration, I began to think about the structure of my dream and how it could bring a vocational program back to our small school, be self-sustaining, and help the community. This was a big challenge.”

He admitted that his proposal looks “at first glance” like a “large shopping list for toys,” because a great deal of what he hopes to use the grant money for will go toward improving the school’s shop facilities.

“Almost ten years ago, because of declining student attendance, the agricultural program was disbanded,” he said. “Since then, our shop has been dissected with state-purchased machinery redistributed to other schools to reinforce their programs. As a result, our students lost the opportunity to work with their hands and to learn vocational skills that are practical and useful beyond high school.”

Over the years, the school’s staff attempted to replace the lost vocational programs with small projects such as Lego robotics, 3D printing/production, shortwave "HAM" radio operation, and "drone" technology. “These specific programs were wonderful introductions, but...had very



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limited lives,” he said, with funding again one of the key constraints.

“By rebuilding our shop to allow for storage and student projects, our vocational programs can return to inspire students, staff, and community to work together to address the needs of the small community in which we live,” Ramsey said. He’ll even get a chance to push a little history with his proposed renovated shop/special projects facility, because he also hopes to build a small blacksmith station there as well.

Renovating the shop will provide the school with the tools and ability to train students, which will lead to the next two projects that are part of his grant proposal. “We will work with the community to build a community greenhouse that is climate controlled. The greenhouse will be used by both elementary and high school students to learn basics of horticulture and (they can) take pride in knowing how to grow things.” The work of building and then using the greenhouse can support curriculum in a number of classes and teach a variety of different skills. Besides learning how to build the greenhouse structure, students also will learn how to pour a cement foundation -- all practical skills that students can take with them later in life.

Finally, the skills the students will learn in the shop class and building the greenhouse will lead to the last project – an 18-station fitness course that will surround the property in front of the school.

“Our PE/health teacher is excited to incorporate the course into her curriculum during the day.” Ramsey said. Besides the school itself, “the community will have another area that they can come to as they meet with family and friends to walk and interact with each other.

“As a long-term goal, the center of the grounds will be leveled and sectioned out to allow for a community garden -- grown using the starts in the greenhouse -- and talks have been conducted between the school and the city council of a green area for multiple forms of recreation, such as frisbee football, summer craft fairs, exhibitions, and so on. The greenhouse will also be used to raise trees and other climate-tolerant plants that will be transplanted around the Fitness Trail to beautify the area and make it more inviting to those that visit,” he explained.

For Ramsey, it’s a dream for both his school and his community. He’s one of those that genuinely enjoys teaching in a small rural setting. Besides history, government and Spanish, he also teaches video productions and conducts a career exploration class. “I am not bored, ever! I admire those teachers at larger schools that are required to teach the same class four to seven times a day. That would drive me crazy.”

Like many teachers, he cherishes his students. “I know them and am with them sometimes 24-7 as we attend classes and after-school activities together. I know their families.” He added that, “Our school is unique because we have almost zero discipline issues. This means that we can devote more time to teaching the entire student body. Along with this, all the students participate in whatever is being taught, unlike other schools that have specific groups that dedicate themselves to advanced studies.

“I feel that I am very fortunate because of what I am allowed to do.”

Ramsey needs the public to vote for him. “I can’t wait to get this grant. There has been a lot of hard work done to get here but there will be a lot more to do come December,” when the grant is awarded and, hopefully, he can start building his dream for his school and his community.

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