



Best New Nonprofit

WASHINGTON STEM

washingtonstem.org

Last fall a Cleveland High School science teacher wanted to teach his students about flow cytometers. His only problem? No, it wasn't that he didn't know what a flow cytometer was; it's a gizmo that analyzes particles. It was that the machines cost as much as half a million dollars. So the teacher turned to Washington STEM, a private nonprofit that began in March 2011. The organization supports STEM education—that's science, technology, engineering, and math, four crucial subject areas in the twenty-first-century workplace. And there's nothing more STEM-y than a flow cytometer.

Grant in hand, the Cleveland teacher bought materials and invited local bioscience engineers from BD Biosciences into the classroom. Together they figured out how to make three cytometers for only \$500 each—and one machine still operates today. Those public high school students will need all that STEM for future employment: Right now there are more than two vacant sciencey jobs for every out-of-work person in the state. Washington STEM has granted and directed more than \$4.1 million in education funds since it was started by concerned state businesses and citizens; you don't need a fancy cytometer doohickey to analyze that.

\$100

would put five to 10 high schoolers on a train into the city, where they see a construction site firsthand and even contribute to a structural design element.

EXTRAORDINARY VOLUNTEER

Renae Goettel

Make-A-Wish Alaska and Washington, nwwishes.org

What if you could have anything in the world? The Make-A-Wish Foundation asks that of kids with life-threatening illnesses, and Renae Goettel got her shot in 2001. Though a surprising 50 percent of recipients choose to hang with Mickey Mouse, this 16-year-old desperately wanted to meet San Antonio Spurs baller Sean Elliott. It wasn't just for his game-clinching three-pointers; he was a fellow kidney transplant survivor. Goettel's rare genetic disorder that necessitated her transplant had also taken her sight, and she had a cancer diagnosis on top of that. Today that ailing teenager (her cancer is now in remission) has matured into a marathon-running professional who moonlights as a wish-granting fairy. Oh, and she's still pals with the NBA All-Star.

Make-A-Wish volunteers commit to coordinating two wishes annually; Goettel juggled five in her first year. She steels herself to enter the homes of very ill children and coaxes big dreams from them: a Disney World visit for a five-year-old or a Hawaiian vacation for a 12-year-old. "The sky's the limit, but you have to get at what they really want," she says. Her celebrity encounter gave her hope, friendship, and the grit to navigate downtown Seattle with her service dog. It's why she volunteers and makes gala speeches for Make-A-Wish: "You can't put a price on a wish."

\$100

pays for excursions during dream trips, like parasailing during a Seattle girl's Hawaii vacation.

LIGHT A FIRE AWARDS 2012

HOW WE CHOSE THE WINNERS

To celebrate the city's nonprofits and the volunteers and benefactors who support them, *Seattle Met* is introducing the first annual Light a Fire Awards.

The selection process began with an invitation to nonprofits and *Seattle Met* readers to nominate people and organizations in 12 categories, telling how and why the nominees deserve recognition. We received some 350 nomination forms, which were vetted by a selection committee that chose winners based on the impact they have on the community and on how well they meet the challenges of their missions. The award recipients in these pages will be honored at a special ceremony on November 14.

We owe many expressions of gratitude to our partners and sponsors who made generous commitments of time and resources. We are in debt to the Seattle Foundation on many levels. Vice president and director of communications Mary Grace Roske helped spread the word among the many nonprofits it supports. During the selection process, foundation president and CEO Norman B. Rice, Roske, and former member of its Youth Grantmaking Board Jamie Landefeld contributed invaluable knowledge of the local nonprofit community. Health insurance provider Regence signed on to sponsor the award ceremony, and Eric Pettigrew, its director of community and business relations, brought thoughtful insight to the selection process. Lastly, Mark Canlis of Canlis restaurant volunteered to host the award dinner, a gesture guaranteeing an extraordinary evening for all.