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Anh Nguyen and Hti Mu Belloc, teacher assistants at Northwood Middle School, help students. A Web site, DonorsChoose.org, lists projects that need funding.

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School projects get financing on Web

BY JOHN PEIRCE

Imagine sitting at your computer and being able to make a difference in the education of a whole classroom of children with a simple keystroke. It's easy to do by logging on to DonorsChoose.org.

At this amazing Web site, teachers post classroom learning proposals that otherwise would not be possible because of funding limitations. Some are creative. Some simply meet basic needs such as school supplies and books. Donors go to the Web site and shop for a project at their favorite school or one that just piques their interest. Donors can contribute as little as \$10 toward the project, but \$100 or more is a lot more fun. Giving that amount or being the one who puts a project over the top entitles you to a full report from the teacher when the project is completed.

When I tried it for the first time, I received a thank-you note from the teacher by e-mail within 24 hours and a receipt from DonorsChoose.org to use for a tax deduction. The teacher was thrilled. It made my day almost as much as it made hers.

The program has earned the highest four-star rating with CharityNavigator. DonorsChoose.org purchases project materials from best-price vendors and ships the materials directly to the school. That ensures the donor's money goes for the intended purpose. Major donors pay for the overhead, so 100 percent of citizen donations go to classrooms.

DonorsChoose.org was developed by a New York City teacher who figured there had to be a better way for public school teachers to finance pro-

jects than out of their own pocket or by begging from friends and family. According to a National Education Association survey, on average teachers spend \$433 of their own money annually for supplies such as books, math flash cards, crayons and other items that help our children learn.

As I write this, there are more than 30 worthy projects designed by Fort Wayne teachers awaiting a micro-philanthropist to "make their day."

What better way to get money to the front lines of education than by backing the creative energies of our own local teachers, media clerks and case-workers? What better way to encourage innovation and initiative in our schools and reach the neediest students in underfunded schools?

Since 2000, the program has channeled more than \$19 million to public and charter schools across the nation. It is just now getting started in Fort Wayne. The program exploded in Indianapolis last year with help from corporate and foundation gifts. Those seed-money gifts partially financed many worthy projects, allowing citizen donors to have the pleasure of finishing the job. It would be great if some local organization would prime the pump in that way, but there is no need for grass roots philanthropists to wait.

Find out how good it feels to make a teacher's dream come true. Go to www.DonorsChoose.org, and make something happen. Then tell all your friends how easy it is to become a freelance philanthropist.

John Peirce, a Fort Wayne businessman, was the chairman for the Write Yellow Right Now committee. He wrote this for The Journal Gazette.