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Staples Center Foundation fills a need in the community

6:33 PM PDT 10/8/2009 by Todd Longwell, AP

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When the Staples Center Foundation was established in 1999, one of its first acts was to pledge \$10,000 scholarships to students graduating that year from the nearby 10th Street Elementary School who later gained admission to a college or trade school.

But the commitment didn't end with that headline-grabbing act. Every Thursday, Staples Center sends more than a dozen staff members to the school to work with the students as reading partners, and every June the school's graduation ceremonies are held on the same floor where the Lakers play.

"We are not the largest grant-making foundation in Southern California," says foundation director Jennifer Lynch, "but we do so many other things all in an effort to be a good neighbor."

The foundation typically focuses its giving on a three-mile radius surrounding Staples Center. When the luxury suites' refrigerators were replaced last year, the old ones were donated to public schools, boys and girls' clubs and other nonprofits in the area. This year, when the arena was upgraded with 700 all-new Panasonic monitors, the displaced TVs went to similar organizations.

And during the past 10 years, the foundation also has awarded more than \$10 million in grants, with one large-scale commitment to a nonprofit annually. In the past, Walt Disney Concert Hall and Inner-City Arts received \$1 million grants; the Salvation Army Red Shield Center received \$250,000. This year, the cause will be A Better L.A., a youth outreach program founded by USC football head coach Pete Carroll, which will receive \$750,000.

But Lynch likes it best when Staples employees get to work hands-on with organizations like Students Run L.A., which trains at-risk youth to participate in -- and complete -- the L.A. Marathon.

"At mile 22, we meet the kids who are really at the back of the pack and maybe a little too discouraged to finish, and one of our employees finishes the race with them," Lynch says. "It's fantastic."

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