

# The Mars Planet Foundation

## 2024-2025 Newsletter

[marsplanetfoundation.org](https://marsplanetfoundation.org)

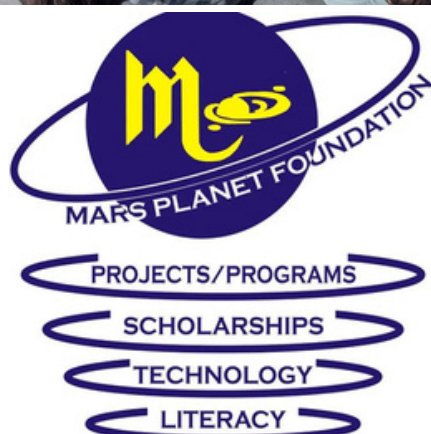
### THE HISTORY

Founded in 2009 as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt charitable organization, the Mars Planet Foundation serves the Mars Area School District by providing opportunities to enhance and enrich the learning endeavors of each student in the District.



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### MISSION

The Mars Planet Foundation focuses on awarding teacher grants throughout each school year to inspire teachers to bring innovative new ideas and programs to their students which ultimately enhance their learning opportunities. We also oversee scholarships that help to enrich our graduating seniors at the annual Academic Excellence and Scholarship Awards Ceremony.

### Mars Planet Foundation Members:

#### Board Members -

Beth Ziegler - President  
Amanda Webster- Vice President  
Kim Vandall - Treasurer  
Kelly Dunn - Secretary  
Jeannie Irwin  
Amy Riggio  
Aaron Rose  
Sandy Page  
Vickie Zaccari

#### Ambassadors -

Jennifer Antonio  
Heliana Galvis-Orr  
Tricia Holland  
Robin Parsons  
Lee Ann Riner  
Doug Wolf

2024-2025

# IMPACT IN ACTION

## Funding recap of the 2024-2025 school year teacher grants

This year saw remarkable success for the Mars Planet Foundation, whose generous teacher grants brought innovative and inspiring educational experiences to students across the Mars Area School District. Thanks to the Foundation's support, first graders at the Primary Center explored the wonders of space through a planetarium assembly, students at the Centennial School honed their strategic thinking on giant chessboards during recess and chess club, and the MAE community came together for the incredible Steel City Showcase. High schoolers in a bioengineering class cultivated learning—literally—with vertical hydroponic towers, while life-saving skills will be taught next year using state-of-the-art CPR mannequins that provide real-time feedback. None of these enriching opportunities would have been possible without the creativity and passion of the District's teachers, and the Foundation's commitment to empowering educators and igniting student curiosity. Read on in the pages of this newsletter to learn more!

MAE	Jim "Basketball" Jones PBIS Kickoff Assembly and Funding for PBIS Prizes	\$4,990.00
High School	AP Exam Fee Reimbursement	\$467.00
Primary Center	Carnegie Science Center "Science on the Road" Planetarium Assembly	\$1,740.00
Centennial	Giant Chessboards	\$2,109.75
Centennial	Defying Gravity Drones	\$5,199.99
High School	College in the High School tuition	\$1,600.00
MAE	Steel City Showcase	\$1,936.00
High School	CPR Feedback Mannequins, CPR Supplies and "Rescue Randy" Full-Body Mannequin	\$7,110.92
High School	Bioengineering Hydroponics	\$7,047.40
High School	Cardio Room Equipment	\$10,000.00
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	\$42,201.06



# Carnegie Science Center's Inflatable Planetarium

First Grade Students Wowed by Astronomy Experience



The Mars Planet Foundation awarded \$1,740.00 to Mrs. Greta Huggins, first grade teacher at the Mars Area Primary Center, to fund an immersive inflatable planetarium experience for all first grade students.

*"Thank you so much for the grant for our inflatable planetarium. I'm thrilled to tell you that our first graders loved the inflatable planetarium experience from the Carnegie Science Center! The planetarium offered our first-grade students a unique opportunity to explore astronomy in an engaging and immersive way. By simulating the night sky and celestial phenomena, the planetarium helps children grasp complex concepts about space, fostering curiosity and a deeper understanding of the universe. Such experiences can ignite a lifelong interest in science and astronomy. The students had such great questions for the presenter. It was easy to see how much of an impact this planetarium had on our students. There was so much excitement from each class as they awaited their turn to experience the planetarium. It was such a great extension to our new science curriculum.*

*Thank you for funding this amazing project for our first graders."*

*-Mrs. Huggins*





# Positive Planets Learn the MARS Way!

New Program is a Slam Dunk at the Elementary School

The Mars Planet Foundation awarded \$5,000.00 to Dr. Samantha Flanhofer, Assistant Principal at Mars Area Elementary School, to fund a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiative. PBIS is an evidence-based, cost-effective, systems approach for establishing the social culture needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all students. Funding was initially used for a PBIS kickoff assembly with Jim "Basketball" Jones and remaining funds were tapped to be used towards the purchase of prizes throughout the year related to the program, which by all accounts was a huge success thanks to the PBIS team at MAE!





# "Check" this out!

## Kings and Queens Rule the Boards at the Centennial School



Chess has been a beneficial past time for centuries, advancing intellectual skills and boosting academic performance, improving memory and critical thinking, and building character and problem-solving strategies. With these benefits in mind, the Mars Planet Foundation funded a grant request from Mr. Chris Churilla in the amount of \$2,109.75 to purchase three giant chessboards for use at the Centennial School. Mr. Churilla reports:

*The student's have been absolutely LOVING the 3 giant chessboards here at Mars Area Centennial! They are in use every morning during chess club and during indoor recess! The students love them so much, they've been asking their parents if they can get one for their house. The students usually play in teams so more people can play at a time and some students even participate as coaches to help other team mates. These have been such a wonderful addition to our school and have really boosted the engagement, love, and learning of the game of chess! During open house, all three boards were in use by students and their families which really showcased the level of engagement these have brought to our school!*





# It's Growing Season!

## Bioengineering Class Incorporates Hydroponic Towers



Students in the High School's Bioengineering class are learning about sustainable agriculture through the use of vertical hydroponic grow towers. The towers, which were purchased through a \$7,115 grant from the Mars Planet Foundation, offer a unique opportunity to combine sustainability, innovation, and hands-on learning, says Jason Roos, technology education teacher, who applied for the grant along with Johnathan Emhardt, science teacher. As part of the High School's bioengineering curriculum, students explore the principles of hydroponic farming, studying the science behind plant growth, water conservation, and ecosystem management. The cross-curricular project allows for collaboration with the high school's Food Fundamentals and Creative Cuisine classes to incorporate the grown produce into healthy, creative dishes and, with Child Development classes, to teach students in the Planet Preschool program about sustainable concepts. In addition, the equipment could be used to grow fresh produce for the school cafeteria, reducing reliance on store-bought food and promoting local, sustainable agriculture.





# Did Yinz Go Dahn to the Steel City Showcase?

Celebrating the 'Burgh at MAE



Mars may be 25 miles north of Pittsburgh, but you never would have known it on the evening of May 22<sup>nd</sup> at MAE. Everything from hand-sewn pickle pillows, to paper-mâché animals arranged in a representation of the Pittsburgh Zoo, to functional paintings of the famous Duquesne Incline, to clay sculptures of Eat'n Park cookies and pierogies (complete with personalities!) were on display as families meandered around the school and took in the spectacular sights and participated in fun crafts, projects and activities. The creativity on display was stunning, thanks to the year-long vision of Mrs. Frye and Mrs. Hinrichsen and the dedication of the teachers and staff that assisted during the Showcase.

## QUOTE FROM ATTENDING PARENT



# Celebrating Achievement: Foundation Supports

## 34th Annual Academic Awards at High School

The scholarships listed below are either funded by the Mars Planet Foundation or the Mars Planet Foundation selects the winner at the request of the sponsoring organization. Congratulations and best wishes to the recipients!

BC3 Pioneer Scholarship - Emily Batchelor

Edward Choura Vocational Automotive/Baseball Scholarship - Aiden Kuremsky

Helen Werner Anderson Memorial Scholarship - Alexandria Settlemyre

Kean Foundation for the Arts Scholarship - Arianna Bruno

Kean Foundation STEM Scholarship - Meagan Williams

Mars Backstop Club Baseball Player Scholarship - Aiden Kuremsky

Mars Cheer Boosters Education Scholarship - Addisyn Vavula & Isabella Yoshioka

Mars High School Girls Basketball Boosters Scholarship - Vitaliana Vargo

Marlin Clay Memorial Scholarship (Mars Musical Theater Boosters) - Arianna Bruno & Ava Herbolich

Mars Aquatic Club Scholarship - Sarah Maloney & Sean Muchnok

Mars Area High School Hockey Scholarship - Colin Stevenson & Gavin Stevenson

Mars Planet Foundation Education Scholarship - Jack Riggio

Mars Planet Foundation School Spirit Scholarship - Ellie Koma

Ross McConnell Memorial Scholarship - Michael Bridgeman

William R "Beel" Neel Scholarship - Madalyn Turney

The Mars Planet Foundation awards the \$2,500 Mars Planet Foundation Education Scholarship and the \$2,500 Mars Planet Foundation School Spirit Scholarship each year and was proud to debut the new Mars Achieve Scholarships, which were awarded in the amount of \$1,000 to three recipients.

The Foundation also sponsors the refreshments at the Academic Excellence & Scholarship Award Ceremony and assists an organization in selecting the recipient of its scholarship when asked to do so.







# PELOTON RAFFLE

## WINNER UPDATE!

- We are happy to announce the outcome of our Peloton Raffle - Congratulations to the winner, Tricia Harris! Thanks to the generous support of Tricia and our community, we raised \$1,855 (after expenses). This fundraising effort will directly fund projects to enrich the educational experience of students and teachers in our school district.
- We also wish to warmly thank the donor of the Peloton for making all of this possible!



# Board Member Opening

## Upcoming Mars Planet Foundation Board Meetings

MPF Board Meetings are typically held the second Tuesday of the month starting at 6:30pm.

- June 17
- July 15 (if needed)
- August 18
- September 16
- October 21
- November 18
- January 20, 2026

## Ambassadors Wanted!

The Mars Planet Foundation is seeking individuals interested in volunteering with the Foundation. Ambassadors are non-voting members who assist the Foundation Board at their level of availability and interest. This role is perfect for those who want to be involved but need flexibility in terms of their commitment. Ambassadors are vital to the Foundation's success!

If you have any questions, please e-mail us at [admin@marsplanetfoundation.com](mailto:admin@marsplanetfoundation.com)

ARE YOU A MASD RESIDENT WHO IS PASSIONATE ABOUT EDUCATION AND LOOKING FOR WAYS TO GIVE BACK TO THE MARS COMMUNITY?

Then the Mars Planet Foundation is for you! We are currently seeking a new Board Member to join our amazing team!

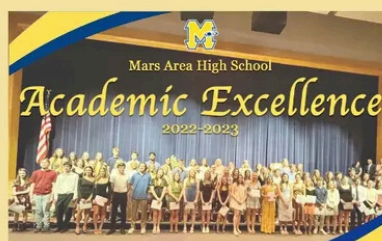


## GENERAL COMMUNITY MEMBER POSITION

Duties include assisting the organization with teacher enrichment grants, student scholarships, and fundraising.

For more information about the Foundation, or if you are interested in submitting your name for consideration, please contact us at [admin@marsplanetfoundation.com](mailto:admin@marsplanetfoundation.com).

All interested applicants are asked to submit a cover letter and resume. Once submitted, a Mars Planet Foundation board member will contact you promptly.





# Thank You to the Businesses Who Make a Difference!

## Scoreboard Sponsors

- Eat'n Park
- Geyer Construction & Development, Inc.
- The Goddard School
- Gratton & Kerr Financial Group
- Kress Restoration
- LEFCON
- MAC.BID
- Paracca Interiors
- Thomas & Williamson Program Management



## Educational Improvement Tax Credit Sponsors

- NexTier Bank
- The Nutrition Group





**NEED EXTRA FUNDS FOR A  
GREAT CLASSROOM  
ENRICHMENT IDEA?**

# **CHECK OUT THE MARS PLANET FOUNDATION'S TEACHER GRANT PROGRAM!**

**BRING YOUR IDEAS TO LIFE!  
APPLY SOLO OR WITH A PARTNER TEACHER TO:**

- **BUILD ON EXISTING IDEAS, PROJECTS, & CURRICULUM**
- **MAXIMIZE RESOURCES**
- **COLLABORATE WITH COLLEAGUES**

**How to Apply:**

- 1. Build your idea and gather information**
- 2. Scan QR code to complete the application**
- 3. Submit for approval**

**Visit our website for more information:  
<https://marsplanetfoundation.org/grants>**

