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School budgets spur realtors to action

by Lillian Cox

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From left, Shannon King and Gaby Preston are the founders of Schoolhouse Realty in Solana Beach. The former schoolteachers have donated 10 percent of each net commission earned to schools and other nonprofits that aid children, totaling \$30,000 in the three years they have been in business. "We are at a point where we can never expect public education to be free," Preston said. "We need the community, parents and other stakeholders to donate money to schools." King added, "Give whatever resources you have. If you are unemployed you can help out in the classroom."

SOLANA BEACH — Shannon King and Gaby Preston may no longer be in the classroom, but their commitment to schoolchildren has not wavered.

The former teachers, now realtors, have donated more than \$30,000 to schools and other nonprofits that benefit children since they opened Schoolhouse Realty in 2008.

Local recipients have included Flora Vista Elementary PTA in

Encinitas; Christa McCauliffe Elementary PTA in Oceanside; the Carlsbad High School Athletic Department; and Ada Harris Elementary in Cardiff.

Other beneficiaries include the Central Asia Institute, a nonprofit that builds schools, especially for girls, in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The program works by donating 10 percent of Schoolhouse Realty's net earnings from a real estate sale to the school or nonprofit of the client's choice.

Recipients of the funds include client alma maters and schools that have been identified as having a great need. One client who was involved in the Big Brother program asked that the money be donated to the school of his "little brother" through

the program.

In 2008 and 2009, \$7,000 was generated for donations. The amount has more than doubled already this year to \$15,000.

"I was inspired by Paul Newman and what he was doing," Preston said. "Our model is to think of creative ways to help publically funded schools. They'll tell us how they will spend it, whether it is on field trips, computers or pencils and paper."

Their generosity hasn't gone unnoticed. A notebook in the office is overflowing with thank you letters from grateful students.

"The whole school and I were flabbergasted to see that you donated \$1,592.50 dollars to the school," wrote elementary school student Tabitha G. "We really appreciated your donation because we are in a budget crisis and we needed the money for classroom supplies or equipment ..."

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"If we could use the money for a field trip I would like to go to Disneyland," he wrote. "At Disneyland we could learn about physics and math by riding the roller coasters."

A great motivator for King and Preston are the deep budget cuts in education.

"The California budget cuts affect a generation of children," Preston said. "We are at a point where we can never expect public education to be free. We need the community, parents and other stakeholders to donate money to schools."

King added, "Whatever resources you have. If you are unemployed you can help out in the classroom."

Preston continues by explaining that in the future schools will be turning to private funds, with teachers more involved in fundraising.

"Teachers need to be in the classroom, not at fundraisers at McDonalds or ice cream night," she said. "The foundations and PTA are most appreciative. They know how much time and organization it takes to raise \$1,000."

Schoolhouse Realty also helps by allowing high school students to earn internship credit by working in their office where they learn public speaking, phone skills, client service, marketing and software programs such as Powerpoint.

"A former intern who just graduated from Torrey Pines High School introduced us to the executive director of the foundation," King said. "I love that he continued to want to help."

King and Preston formed their partnership after meeting at a neighborhood concert in Del Cerro in 2008.

King had worked as elementary and middle school English teacher in Austin, Texas, for several years. She bought her first home at 21 and got a real estate license to flip houses and teach the process to others. She had already started Schoolhouse Realty from her home when she met Preston who was studying for her California real estate license after teaching honors English, ESL and student government to middle school students in Scottsdale and San Diego.

"I looked over at Shannon at the concert and could tell by her key chain that she was in real estate," Preston remembers. "I said, 'Can I take you to lunch?' We really hit it off. I said, 'I'm not sure what's in it for me but I think we could have a great company.'"

Schoolhouse Realty is located at 665 S. Cedros Ave., Solana Beach. For more information, call (858) 461-1155 or e-mail hello@schoolhoureality.com.

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