

School Teacher Sheila Perry, N0UOP, Blasts Off With \$155,000 of Grant Money

Condensed from June '95 *QST*, by Connie Dunn, KB5LES

Bloomfield, Missouri, is a small town away from any metropolitan area. But it's been blasted into space by Amateur Radio operator and school teacher Sheila Perry, N0UOP. She's responsible for taking children into space via simulations, and giving them new worlds to explore. She's introduced teachers to a new way of teaching. "It's so exciting; kids want to learn! It hasn't always been so; I had a fear of teaching outside the school curriculum. But when I tried it, I found success in my students' eyes. Christa McAuliffe endeavored to fulfill her dreams; she's my inspiration to reach for the stars," said Sheila.

Sheila has funded her dreams with grants--lots of grants. Her ultimate dream, she said, "is to get a million dollar grant and build a space station on Earth." In 1995, four different grants gave Sheila \$155,000 for her school district. The money funded curriculum development, Amateur Radio equipment, electronic kits, a computer lab and other items. *How to Fit More SPACE into a CROWDED Curriculum* is a book Sheila published with grant money. The book is filled with lesson plans on space and Amateur Radio that span different age groups and curricula, submitted by teachers from all over the US. (For details write to Sheila at Bloomfield School, Box R, Bloomfield, MO 63825.)

The grants funded her project, "Building the First City on Mars," which combined geography, language, science and math. As examples, to build the "City," one grade level worked on pets in space, designing space suits for animals and deciding what the animals needed. One grade investigated communication, which involved Amateur Radio, of course. "Space," explained Sheila, "is touching the future. The goal was to begin a new civilization by simulating the first city on Mars. Students researched what was needed to maintain life on Mars. They looked at such problems as language barriers, government, transportation and recreation (all have a ham radio tie-in). This project was designed for kindergarten through 12th grade, and the goal was to improve test scores, foster problem solving and encourage thinking skills.

Improving Test Scores

Space and Amateur Radio are a potent combination. In 1991, Bloomfield third grade science test scores showed 81% of the students had mastered required skills. 1993 scores rose to 92%! Sheila reports: "Attitudes and interest in technology increased in a positive way, and parents became very supportive."

Hands-On, Real-Life Experiences

Sheila's KATS project, "Kids As Teachers," had students fill out lesson plans, questions and assessments. They kept KATS Portfolio Pouches containing a satellite-tracking logbook and a packet-radio-pal journal among other things. Another learning project was a real-life exercise. Said Sheila, "We live on the New Madrid fault, so the kids investigated earthquakes." Goals

were to learn what to do if an earthquake hits. They conducted research and wrote papers explaining why it happens, and learned basic first-aid. Students developed a before, during and after earthquake-preparedness book involving ham radio.

Teacher and Student Networking

"I like to talk, and I like packet," said Sheila of her Amateur Radio operations. One of the school's projects included linking up with schools via packet. Sheila founded "A Touch of Space" Amateur Radio Club for the Bloomfield Schools. Another grant allowed her to start a newsletter entitled: *Hams of the Future: Calling the World Closer Together*.

Sheila's Grant-Writing Steps

Before:

A good reporter uses the five Ws and H (who/what/when/where/why/how) when creating a story, and a good grant writer does the same. Ask yourself these questions.

1. *Why Do I Need A Grant Or Extra Funding?* Low scores? Surveys or research indicate a need? Enrichment for my class? A special project?
2. *How Will I Accomplish My Dream Or Reach My Goal?* You're going to write a grant to...
3. *What Do I Think About When Writing A Grant?* What do I want and why? What are my objectives and my needs? What is my expected outcome? How much \$\$ do I need? What will the title of my project be? (Make it catch the reader's eye.)
4. *Who Is Involved In My Project?* Students? Parents? Community? Other teachers?
5. *When Will My Project Start And End?* A brief calendar of major activities is helpful.
6. *Where Will The Grant Occur?* My classroom? Building? Outside? Involve other school districts?

During:

The "during" phase of your grant writing is, "I gotta get the reader's attention and keep it." Follow guidelines carefully. If the rules say double-space, then do it! Write in easy-to-understand English (no one likes jargon)--grant proposals given by corporations may be read by non-educators. If the guidelines request only four pages, make that your limit. Use a word processor. Make sure your supervisor and principal read and approve what you're doing. You'd hate to receive money that someone won't let you spend. Make sure all signatures and dates are in the right places. Have someone else proofread your copy. You may want to use the following sections in your proposal.

- *Introduction:* Be brief, to the point and clear. Tell who's involved, the goal, major purchases, community involvement, and include a brief paragraph of major activities.
- *Need:* One of the biggest problems in most grants is the "Need Statement." You want to show a real need for this money, so use many different justifications to support it. Take surveys of students, other teachers, community and parents. List test scores in the area of

your grant, and teacher observations. Do not give your opinions. Make sure your need matches what you plan to do and how you'll spend the money.

- *Planning:* If your proposal asks you to state how you did your planning, tell what you have studied. Did you attend workshops? Are you involved in major national organizations? Did you visit another school that already had this project or are you adapting/adopting it? If so, give credit. Did you talk to a professor or other who helped you plan it? Did you form a committee? Who was on it and what did you do? If someone writes a letter of support, make sure the letter supports the project you're applying for, not other projects you've done in the past. Involve parents and community (it looks good.) What surveys did you take? I keep a calendar on my desk and every time I make a contact, receive information, visit a district or attend a workshop, I make note of it. When I write a grant, I go through my calendar and list everything I've done.
- *Goal, objectives, and evaluation:* Your goal (given in your introduction) should be repeated here. Tell readers how you are going to fulfill your needs. Take your need statements and write goals, objectives and evaluations to match. Don't attempt more than three to five objectives. Make them measurable and don't make an activity an objective.
- *Description and schedule of planned activities:* This section tells what you're going to do with the money if they give it to you. List your major activities by months. If you're giving pretests and posttests--when? Are you having guest speakers? When will your project begin and end? Are you having meetings with teachers or the community?
- *Budget explanation:* Explain how you're going to spend the grant money. Don't list \$3,000 for equipment and not list what you're buying! Some guidelines insist that you put certain expenditures in certain categories. If you have an "equipment" category that's budgeted at \$3000, don't go over that amount. However, equipment can be interconnecting cables or what's needed to make it work.
- *Finally:* Give your proposal to teachers who are not close friends. Your friends are afraid of hurting your feelings and won't critique well. Find someone who can offer you constructive criticism and learn to take it. After editing your proposal, proofread it again and mail it by the due date.

After:

Be honest. If you made a mistake or can't meet your objectives, say so. Grants are a way for teachers to improve their teaching, which in turn will improve student performance. Grants are also a way for teachers to learn from their mistakes, so other teachers can learn as well. Ask for parent help. Share whatever you're doing with parents and community. Send thank-you letters to people supplying the funds and anyone who helped you. If it's a state or federal grant, thank your senator, representative or governor.

Remember:

You won't get it unless you ask, and all they can do is tell you no.