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GARDINER, MONTANA Teachers and affordable teacher housing are highly valued. Gardiner Public School (GPS) sits on the northern border of Yellowstone National Park. Despite the challenges of soaring housing prices, which have made it difficult for local workers - including teachers - to afford to live in the area, a group of parents recognized the changing landscape and decided to take action. Six years ago, they formed the North Yellowstone Education Foundation (NYEF), which has been working tirelessly ever since to support education in the community and ensure that new teachers have a place to live.

NYEF has successfully funded \$800K to support phase one of its Teacher Housing Initiative (THI). The initiative is a collaborative project with GPS and aims to attract and retain teachers and staff by providing affordable housing to supplement their wages. Three years ago, NYEF began remodeling a historic house built in 1904. Today, all three units are occupied by GPS teachers and staff.

Cody Carlson, 7-12th grade math teacher, “Kiara and I are extremely grateful to have a home in Gardiner as we start our teaching career. It is so impressive to me (and my colleagues in education around the state) that we have teacher housing available from a local nonprofit. Aside from being in a great spot near Yellowstone, the housing demonstrates that public education is very valuable to our community. It is humbling that the NYEF board has put in so much energy to ensure lasting solutions for the school in Gardiner to continue to be one of the best. Having a legitimate house near the school with three units will serve the school and the broader community of families for a long time by making it affordable and realistic to live in Gardiner.”

Laura Chastain, NYEF Director, said, “I’ve spent almost 20 years living in National Parks. For many families who rely on national parks for income, choosing a job usually comes down to the availability of housing, the location of the school, and then the job itself. GPS is highly respected and offers education from kindergarten to grade 12. This was the reason my family was drawn to Yellowstone. As I got more involved in the community, I learned that our teachers were nearing retirement age and that finding housing was a major issue. I joined the board of NYEF and started working towards supporting the THI plan. I’m proud of the progress NYEF has made in just six years. Although the first phase of our THI plan is finished, we’re moving on to phase two to ensure we can continue meeting the school’s needs.”

Pat Baltzley, School Board Chair, said, “We are so grateful for the hard work that NYEF has done to provide housing for our staff. This was needed, and NYEF stepped up to the plate to help us with this need. We would not have been able to recruit and retain the talented staff we have. It is impressive that they have been able to pay off the loan for this teacher’s housing in such a short amount of time. I hope we can start on another housing project soon with NYEF!”

The \$800,000 project was made possible with the help of numerous donors, including The Park County Community Foundation, George L. Ohrstrom Jr. Foundation, Gianforte Family Foundation, Steele-Reese Foundation, Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, Gardiner Area Resort District, and First Interstate Bank and Foundation. Additionally, private donors have contributed over \$350,000 to the project.

Gardiner Public School holds a significant position as a focal point for the community. It serves as a hub for fostering relationships and hosting various events, including sports, plays, musicals, and more. With an awe-inspiring view of Roosevelt Arch, which greets all visitors on their way to the year-round entrance of Yellowstone National Park, the school stands as a testament to the importance of education. The teachers at Gardiner Public School are an integral part of our community, contributing to its growth and development. Families are the backbone of any community, and the school provides a space for children to learn, thrive, and grow amidst the stunning natural beauty of the surrounding landscape.

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