

Inspirational Alum, Supporter Generosity, and New Venue Bring Record Results for REA³D by Candlelight 2026

Inspirational Alum...

The excitement of the evening was palpable as current and past Proctor High School students and teachers, friends, family, and loyal sponsors converged at the Pike Lake Golf and Beach Club for the 2026 REA³D by Candlelight Dinner Event. This year’s speaker was U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Whitney Olson, a 2006 Proctor graduate and a 148th Fighter Wing Senior NCO of the Year.

Sgt. Olson both entertained and impressed the audience with her heartfelt presentation including Proctor school stories, Air Force roles and responsibilities, and her professional career.

Whitney recognized the power of community and the support she received from family, teachers, coaches and peers throughout her Proctor school years, and how it influenced her future. Whitney shared that her early experiences—like volunteering and participating in school activities—instilled a mindset of contribution and belonging. All through her college athletics and into her professional life, Whitney recognized that believing in someone and maintaining an

encouraging, positive outlook can change a person’s life trajectory. She has taken these lessons to heart; she shared how important it has been for her to support others intentionally, recognize potential in those around her, and understand the ripple effect of encouragement.

It is clear those values also contributed to her success with the 148th Fighter Wing. Whitney talked about how “enlisting in the Air National Guard allowed me to commit to something greater than myself.” She has completed 19 years of service, including numerous deployments overseas, and holding a leadership role in fatality search and recovery operations.

Whitney acknowledges her service has helped build purpose, resilience, and a deep sense of responsibility for others. These principles also play well with her professional career at Arthrex.

Whitney left the audience with these closing comments: Success is not just about achievements, but about the values, character, and connec-

tions she has embraced through life that guide those achievements. Her final thoughts: “What you do declares who you are, but who you are defines what you do.”

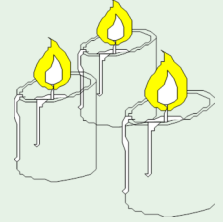
Board member Christy Strohm summed up the feelings for our honored guest speaker: “It was such a joy having Whitney and her group of friends and family there this year! I was fascinated by her Proctor stories and professional adventures. It was also wonderful to see the impact she had on so many people. It is always great seeing someone from Proctor succeed both professionally *and* in their personal life.”



Whitney surrounded by her friends and teammates, many who attended the REA³D by Candlelight event for the first time.

Supporter Generosity ...

A big thank you to the businesses, school staff, students and community members who generously contributed to our most successful event to date, the 2026 REA³D by Candlelight Auction and Dinner Event, which raised nearly \$48,000. Please support our business partners and let them know you appreciate their sponsorship of REA³D efforts.



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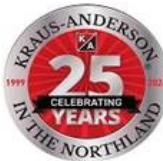
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| Duluth Whiskey Project | Operation Parendo |
| Duluth Children's Museum | Phil Johnson |
| Elite Sports Complex | PHS Drama |
| Going Bananas Race | PHS CTE |
| Johnson 's Bakery | PHS Athletics |
| JwMillz Salon | Purple Car Cafe |
| Keypart Liquor | Russell Habermann |
| Kolar Toyota | Shack Restaurant |
| Lincoln Park Crafting Community | Skalko Family Farm |
| | Kerry Welsh |

New Venue! Pike Lake Golf and Beach Club offered elegant dining style and great access for silent auction and dessert displays.



WE SUPPORT LIFELONG LEARNING WITHIN PROCTOR SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMUNITIES

RECORD RESULTS for REA³D 2025-26

Reached its first \$1 million fundraising goal

Awarded a record \$28,479 in REA³D grants for 2025-26

Allocates up to 5% of the fund for grant awards

Reached the milestone of 204 grant awards totaling \$204,500 since 2007

Raised a record \$48,000 at the REA³D by Candlelight 2026 Event

PHS Alumni Sisters and Retired PHS Educator Embark on Snow Journey, Cashing out a 2025 Candlelight Winning Live Auction Bid



Proctor High School graduates Roxanne Ahlgren Bijold (1975), Raylene Ahlgren (1977) and Robyn Ahlgren Schroeder (1978) (pictured above) are never ones to pass up an adventure opportunity. After seeing a winter camping trip on the live auction list at the 2025 REA³D by Candlelight Dinner, they quickly coordinated their bidding strategy and were delighted to secure the winning bid.

The three-day, two-night BWCAW winter camping trip was donated by Glen Sorenson, a retired Proctor High School teacher who now leads expeditions through Wilderness Snow Journeys. The adventure began just north of Grand Marais along the Gunflint Trail with a mile-and-a-half snowshoe hike covering frozen lakes and a portage to a campsite on Duncan Lake.

Sorenson provided expert guidance on maneuvering the custom-made toboggans he provided through the steep uphill and downhill portage trail making the journey go smoothly.

Throughout the journey, many stories were shared as the sisters reminisced about past summer canoe trips to the same location and plenty of Proctor HS stories of the past. Highlights of the trip included two dinners featuring fresh lake trout, a beautiful day hike to an adjacent lake, and stargazing across the inky night winter sky.

Sorenson’s winter trips are full-service affairs. He provided comprehensive guiding including all camping gear, custom toboggans, a wall tent, food, kitchen supplies and a wood stove – everything we needed for a great experience! In addition, he expertly navigated the ice conditions ensuring the group followed the best trails, avoided slush and returned safely to our entry point parking area.

To learn more about experiencing the solitude and beauty of the BWCAW in winter with one of REA³D’s sponsors visit snowjourneys.com.

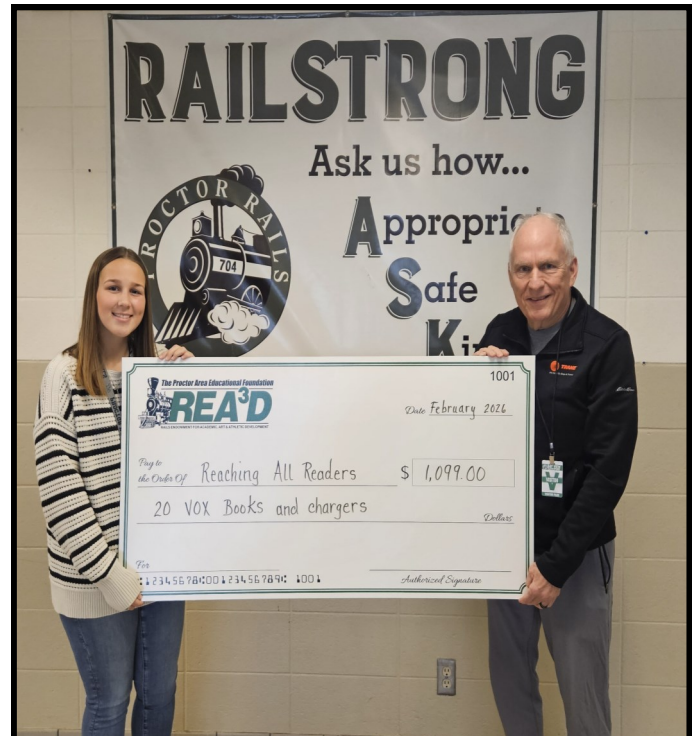


Above right: Winter tent, fresh lake trout, and Sorenson serves dinner.

IN ACTION

Reaching All READERS Sharpens Reading Skills for Learners with Special Needs

As a special education instructor, Maggie Skinner sees many students who are still developing their reading skills, but don't always have physical books they can easily access at their ability level. Maggie learned about REA³D grant opportunities at Proctor's annual "back to school" staff event. She applied for and was awarded a REA³D grant to help young readers sharpen their reading skills. This \$1,099 grant purchased 20 Vox Books and 4 chargers. Vox Books are hardcover books with an attached audio device that reads the story aloud while students follow along in the physical book. Emily Klund, who also teaches special education says, "This project focused on students in grades 5-10 who often face the greatest barriers to becoming confident readers. In a special education classroom, students may struggle with decoding, fluency, attention, or processing written text. Vox Books allow them to access grade-level-appropriate stories that might otherwise be too challenging. Students can listen through the built-in speaker or use headphones, which makes the books flexible for individual reading time. Through the availability of these books, we have seen a significant increase in student engagement during reading time. Students who often struggled to stay focused during independent reading are now able to follow along with the story because the audio

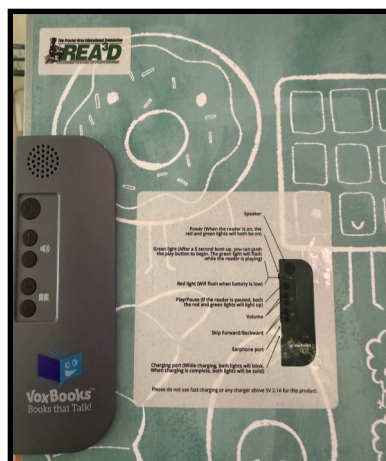


Emily Klund accepts REA³D grant check from REA³D treasurer Jim Ward.

supports them. The page-turn signal also helps students keep their place in the text. Teachers have observed that students are spending more time with books and showing greater confidence when interacting with text. For many of our learners, positive reading experiences are essential to building long-term literacy skills, and these books have helped create those experiences. "



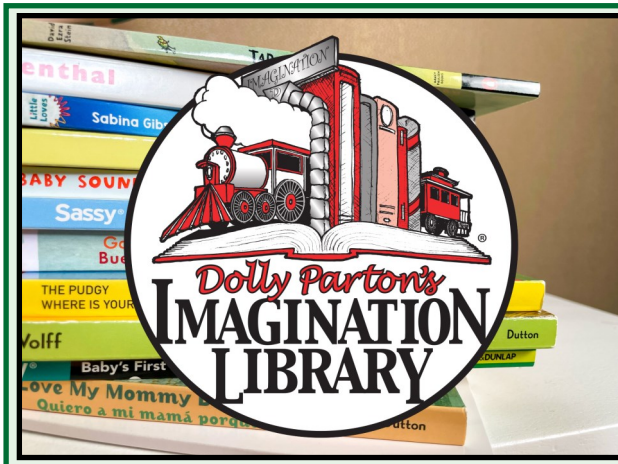
ABOVE: VOX Reaching All READERS Books that can be attached to the read-aloud device.



LEFT: The VOX book reader pictured allows students to hear and follow along with stories of interest to their age group that might otherwise be too challenging for them to read on their own. As with all REA³D awards, grantees are encouraged to display the REA³D logo on items purchased with REA³D grant funding.

REA³D Helps Send 19 Jedlicka Middle School Students to Leadership REMIX

Leah Kane, JMS Student Council Advisor and JMS 7th grade case manager has high praise for Leadership REMIX. She applied and was awarded a REA³D grant for \$855 to help send nineteen JMS students to a Leadership REMIX workshop. The ultimate goal of this project was to make a positive impact on community building and school culture at JMS. Through engaging activities and discussions, students explored their unique leadership styles, learned how to build stronger school teams, and developed strategies to build bridges within their communities. Go Rails!



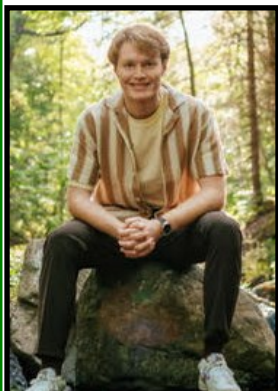
REA³D continues to partner with the Dollywood Foundation to provide Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to children ages 0-4 in the Proctor School District. Since the partnership started in 2022, this program has gifted 5,882 books to our youngest learners! A special thank you to the businesses, organizations, and individuals that are sponsoring a month of book-giving in 2026: Billings Roofing & Siding, Bell Bank, City of Proctor, Irving Community Club, and Lynn Dart-Nelson. Learn more about this program rea3d.org/imaginationlibrary

First REA³D Scholarships Awarded to Two PHS Students

For the first time this spring, REA³D offered two \$2,500 scholarships, open to high school seniors who have chosen a post-secondary education path and shown a desire to learn beyond the scope of regular classroom activities, as evidenced by community service, volunteerism, work-based learning or other life experiences. Scholarship applicants were required to have a 3.0 GPA or higher, be enrolled in an accredited post-secondary institution or be accepted into a recognized apprenticeship program, and demonstrate a lifelong learning aptitude.

This year's recipients are Bodee McFadden and Olivia Morin-Swanson.

Bodee McFadden balanced a demanding schedule of athletics, academics, work and community service throughout his high school education. As an active mountain bike cyclist, Bodee embraced leadership opportunities by serving on the Duluth Devo Youth Board of



Directors, assisting with COGGS trail system maintenance, event coordination, and coaching younger athletes on riding techniques. For Bodee, learning occurs through hands-on experiences, continuous process analysis, and personal discipline. He plans to pursue a degree in Mechanical engineering at Colorado Mesa University.

Olivia Morin-Swanson studied abroad her freshman year, represented the Proctor community and high school through numerous advocacy groups, and performed a leading role in the spring PHS play. Her leadership experience has been developed through serving as president of the National Honor Society, supporting youth involvement at her church, and serving as the student liaison on the ISD #704 School Board. In addition to participating in community drama programs, Olivia also serves the greater Duluth community through volunteer work with multiple organizations such as CHUM and senior living facilities. Olivia plans to attend Carleton College in Northfield, MN.



17 FALL 2025 and WINTER 2026 REA³D GRANT AWARDS
TOTAL \$28,479

Title of Project	Project Leads	Description of funding request	AMOUNT Awarded
School Forest Project	John Awsumb	Funding for tables, gravel to create a better learning space in School Forest	\$2,000
Yearbook Camera Project	Heidi Voss	Funding for 4 digital cameras for Proctorian yearbook students (and others) to use for high quality photography	\$2,500
Dolly Parton Imagination Library	Russell Habermann	80 Proctor school district pre-school children receive high quality children's books for one year to encourage early literacy through this ongoing program	\$2,500
Leadership REMIX	Leah Kane	Registration fees for leadership conference for 19 middle school students	\$855
Battle of the Books	Kaitlyn Koehler; Kari Flores, Rosemary Barilla	Purchase of books to promote motivation through gamification of reading	\$650
The Amazing Generation	Tom Mitchell	Funding to support purchase of 8 copies of the Amazing Generation, for novel studies to help students understand the impact of excessive screen time	\$92
Reaching All Readers	Maggie Skinner	Purchase of Best Selling Picture Books Collection —20 titles and 4 chargers.	\$1,099
Scripps Competition	Lindsay Moen Rosemary Barilla	Funds to purchase items that allow Proctor middle school students to compete in Scripps spelling competition	\$1,500
PHS Film project	Ted Kiefat	Purchase of two high quality specialized cameras for student film production work with Rails TV	\$1,921
Assistive Technology Lending Library	Maggie Hartmann and Emma Barnaby	Purchase of 5 high-tech C-Pens that will read written content aloud to students who are not yet able to access printed information without a human reader—to be part of assistive technology library for use by all students	\$2,000
Broadcast Communications for Rails TV	Tanner Hargraves	Purchase of upgraded broadcast intercom equipment, wireless intercom with 8 headsets for Rails TV	\$2,202
Enclosure of the Light and Sound Booth	Lynn Peterson, Olivia Morin-Swanson, Malikia Brostrom	Funds to enclose and secure PHS auditorium's light and sound space currently damaged and outdated, and to purchase iPad for optimal sound production	\$2,500
PHS Speech Program Startup	Ashton Barsoom	Support for speech coach, supplies and entry fees to speech competitions.	\$2,500
Clear Book Bins	Stacy Halli	Purchase of 200 clear plastic book bins to better display books and encourage reading by elementary students	\$2,500
Duluth Children's Museum	Drew Jensen	Funds to facilitate 50 elementary students' participation in 2-day Forces of Flight, Space Engineering, planets & stars, and Soaring Satellites engineering experiences.	\$600
Reading Pals	Ines Chandler Natascha Ellis	Early literacy support, purchase of 50 age-appropriate books for the Reading Pals Library and small incentives for students for special occasions	\$860
DECA Nationals	Brittany Schubitzke	Purchase of DECA nationals competition packages for two national's qualifying PHS students	\$2,200



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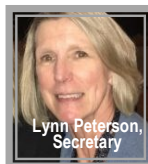
SPRING AND SUMMER 2026

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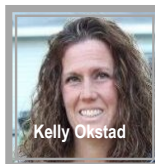
ABOUT REA³D

Rails Endowment for Academic, Art and Athletic Development (REA³D) is the Proctor Area Educational Foundation.

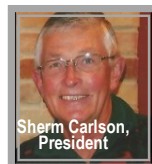
REA³D was established in 1996 to support lifelong learning within the Proctor School District communities. Specifically, it seeks to enable life-enriching academic, art and athletic activities which cannot rely on traditional educational funding.



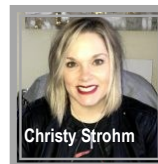
Lynn Peterson,
Secretary



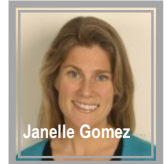
Kelly Okstad



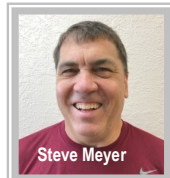
Sherm Carlson,
President



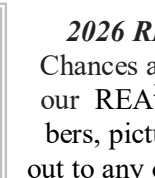
Christy Strohm



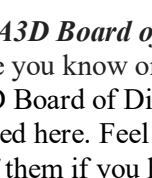
Janelle Gomez



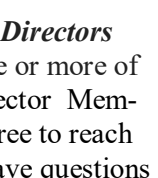
Steve Meyer



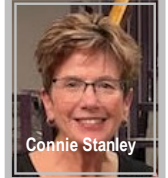
Kelly Okstad



Sherm Carlson,
President



Christy Strohm

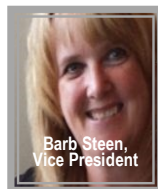


Connie Stanley

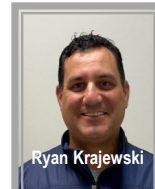
2026 REA³D Board of Directors

Chances are you know one or more of our REA³D Board of Director Members, pictured here. Feel free to reach out to any of them if you have questions

about events, have ideas for REA³D grants or want to become more involved!



Barb Steen,
Vice President



Ryan Krajewski



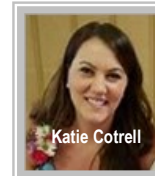
Rory Johnson



Russell Habermann



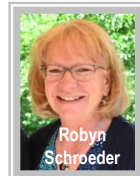
Gordy Westendorf



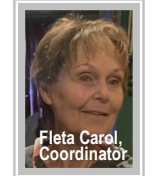
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