JLE teacher has ‘Bright Idea’
Grant to fund classroom learning

BY DEBBIE HIGHTOWER

TRINITY — Every moment counts. Shanda Mattocks, a kindergarten teacher at John Lawrence Elementary School recently received a grant that will help students fill their downtime with creative, brain-stimulating activities.

Mattocks was one of 40 teachers who received a 2017 Bright Ideas education grant to fund innovative classroom learning projects. She received $1,500 for her STEM Maker Space for Kinders project that will benefit 70 students at the kindergarten level.

"Kindergarten is the perfect time to introduce the engineering design process through STEM activities because it builds on natural curiosities to create," said Mattocks. "It engages students in problem solving and finding solutions at an early age. We want to create a learning environment that allows students to be more active. Whenever this happens, students are engaged in their own learning.

Darrin Shaffer of EnergyUnited visited John Lawrence to deliver a big check to Shanda Mattocks. Her STEM Maker Space Bright Ideas project will directly benefit more than 70 students at JLE.

IDEA

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EnergyUnited created the Bright Ideas education grant program in 1994 to support teachers and enhance education by engaging students in meaningful learning projects that encourage creative approaches. The grants are available to K-12 teachers from public, public charter, private and Christian schools for innovative projects in any subject. Teachers can apply individually or as a team and must apply online. The maximum grant amounts for teachers submitting a grant application through EnergyUnited are up to $2,000 per applicant.

Mattocks, who has 28 years of experience in education (13 of them at John Lawrence Elementary), often heard students say, “I’m finished. What do I do now?” Rather than watch television or play video games, Maker Space will answer their needs with brain-stimulating activities such as Legos, pop cubes, magnetic engineering blocks, gears, nuts and bolts, Tinker Toys and other materials, along with activity cards depicting their use.

“It is clear that most jobs of the future will require a basic understanding of math and science,” said Mattocks. “Our hope is to improve scores at John Lawrence in testing grades with an early start on problem solving and engineering activities. By starting this in kindergarten, we are preparing our kinders for the future and hopefully onward bound to college.”

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