

# Wichita school bond issue backers reveal donors

BY LORI YOUNT The Wichita Eagle – December 31, 2008

- [View the Citizens Alliance for Responsible Education's finance report.](#)

The group that supported the successful \$370 million bond issue for Wichita schools raised \$187,000 for its campaign, with the largest donations coming from leaders of construction and architecture firms, according to documents filed Tuesday with the Sedgwick County Elections Office.

Leaders of the two anti-bond groups said they combined to raise a comparable amount.

The donor lists are due today, and bond opponents said they plan to file theirs before 5 p.m.

Unlike candidates for public office and political action committees, groups raising money to

influence voters on a ballot issue don't have to register with the state's Governmental Ethics Commission. There are no limits on how much money a single donor can give. The groups are only required to turn in a list of donors and expenses by Dec. 31 the year of the election.

Because the pro-bond group, Citizens Alliance for Responsible Education, fell short of its \$400,000 fund-raising goal, the group relied heavily on volunteers to carry out the campaign, said co-coordinator Randy Thon. The bond passed with 51 percent of the vote.

The largest donations were given by local firms, many of which received business from a \$284.5 million bond issue passed in 2000.

"On the 2000 bond issue, virtually all the architecture was done by local companies..." said Keith Stevens, treasurer for CARE in the 2008 and 2000 bond campaigns. "It's been through that experience, they're more willing to support us this time."

The household of Kenton Cox, a principal of the district's bond consulting firm, Schaefer Johnson Cox Frey Architecture, donated almost \$14,000. Cox couldn't be reached for comment Tuesday.

The firm was also listed as giving in-kind contributions of \$15,350, which Stevens said were donated yard signs.

The majority of the monetary donations were given in increments of hundreds or a few thousand dollars, but some were larger. For instance, Foley Rental and Clay Davis, of National Contractors, each gave at least \$10,000.

"They saw there was a need to invest in the community, and they were behind it," Thon said. "I don't think it's personal gains. I think they saw the big picture."

Bob Weeks, of the anti-bond group Wichitans for Effective Education, said he expected some of the biggest donors supporting the bond issue would be people and businesses that would be in the running for contracts for bond projects.

Pro-bond donors also included several school district employees and board members, who are not barred from participating in a private capacity.

Interim superintendent Martin Libhart gave \$1,000. Board member donations included the household of president Lynn Rogers with \$500 and the household of vice president Barb Fuller with \$550.

The pro-bond group spent about \$25,000 on polling, which was "encouraging" because it showed about a 50 percent chance of the bond issue passing, Thon said.

Absent from CARE's contributors were large donations by aircraft companies. In 2000, Boeing donated \$10,000 to kick off the campaign, and Cessna gave \$5,000.

Russ Meyer, chairman emeritus of Cessna, gave \$1,000 to this year's campaign.

Thon said area aircraft companies' impending layoffs probably led them not to contribute.

"They wanted to see where the economic times were going," he said. "They were supporting, but they did not get out and pull it along."

Reach Lori Yount at 316-268-6269 or [lyount@wichitaeagle.com](mailto:lyount@wichitaeagle.com).