



RURAL
technology fund

Reaching for the Stars



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



A few weeks ago, I noticed that the moon looked particularly bright. It was low against the horizon but in an ideal spot so that I could see it through my telescope from the back porch. My son had already gone to bed, but the opportunity was too good to pass up. I crept up to his room, asked him if he wanted to see something cool, and out to the yard we went. Now let me tell you, there's nothing like the first time you see the moon up close through the lens of a telescope. The curvature giving way to its dark side, the elegant detail of the craters, the cliffs and valleys... it all seems so considerably closer and real; like you could just reach out and touch it. For days, little Eli talked about the moon and the planets. He opined about the Mars Rover, asked a lot of great questions about rockets, and declared that he wanted to be an astronaut when he grows up. It's amazing how a glimpse of something new can make so many possibilities seem achievable.

This year, the Rural Technology Fund turned 15. Over the course of that time, we've helped over 180,000 kids all across the country catch a glimpse of futures they didn't know were possible. A few highlights from this year include:

- In Cuba, NY, students started a Girls in Manufacturing and STEM (GLEAM) club as a space to explore their talents.
- In St Clair County, AL, we helped build an assistive technology library so teachers could help students with disabilities access technology in new ways.
- In Trinidad, CO, students programmed and built robots as part of a self-contained, solar-powered hydroponics grow cart to cultivate lettuce and other vegetables.
- In Gillett, WI, we assisted a public library in introducing a Full STEAM Ahead program to bring tech education to their patrons and let them borrow robots for continued learning.

In support of our work in the classroom, we've also made several new relationships with community partners. These connections help us provide more services to rural schools and make these organizations more available in areas they might not be able to reach otherwise. This year, we've brought Makey Makey, VEX Robotics, and Sphero on board and are excited about our continued work with them.

One of my favorite projects this year was the publication of our first children's book, *Thinking Outside the Coop*, written and illustrated by Betsy Von Hagen. We hoped to produce a book that helped introduce students to some of the tech education tools we provide to schools, and we've heard nothing but rave reviews since its release. Even better, because our launch campaign went so well, we've been able to donate quite a few books for free to rural schools!

In this annual report, we'll share some highlights from our work in 2023. I hope you'll enjoy reading these stories and seeing photographs of students who've taken part in programs we've funded and supported.

As always, I want to thank the teachers, students, volunteers, and partners who support our mission. Whether it's happening in school classrooms, after-school programs, public libraries, maker spaces, or children's museums... we're going to continue working to give children a glimpse of futures they didn't know were possible.

CHRIS SANDERS

Founder and Executive Director

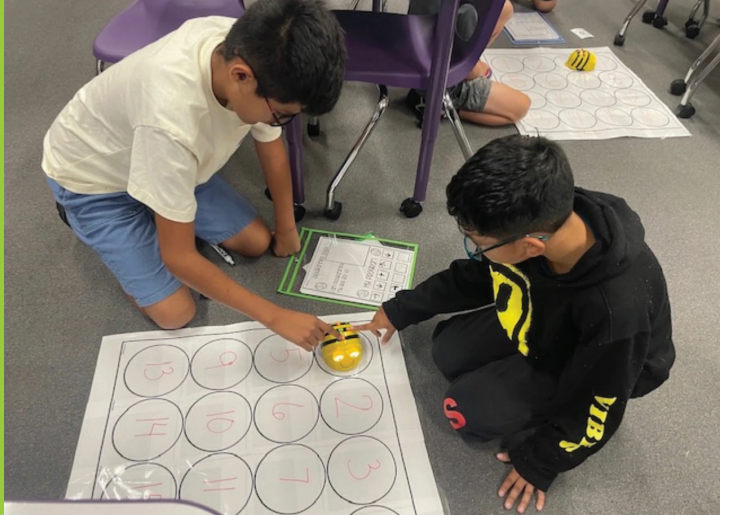


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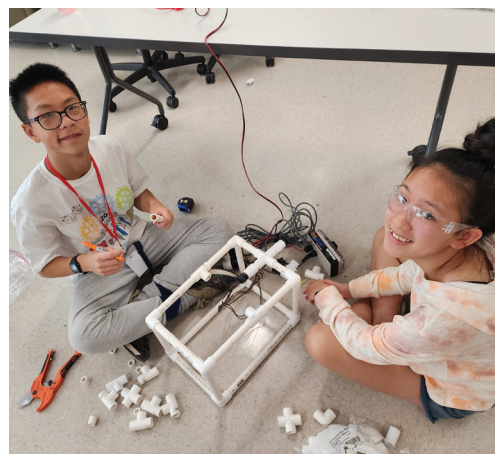
The mission of the RTF is to help rural students recognize opportunities in technology careers, facilitate pathways to work in the computer industry, and provide equitable access to technology for students with disabilities.



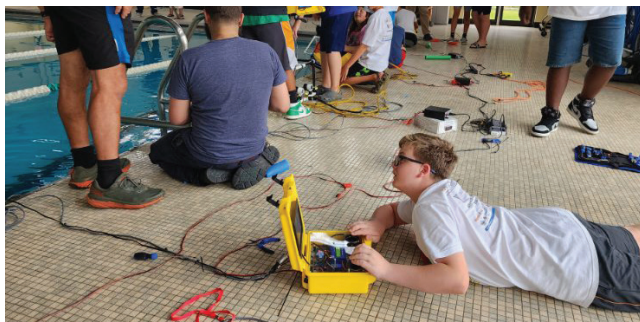
UNDERWATER ROBOTICS

In the summer of 2022, Walters State Community College made a splash by introducing underwater robotic camps. It all began with a simple question to students: **what do you want more of?** The overwhelming response was a call for more STEM opportunities. Armed with the valuable survey feedback, the Coordinator of Youth Programs, Dr. Nicole Cardwell-Hampton, took on the challenge and became a certified instructor in Underwater Robotics. She then took the reins and brought the camps to life!

In the beginning of 2023, the RTF provided a grant to Walters State Community College located in Morristown, Tennessee, with the aim of supporting their underwater robotic camps. This grant encompassed ten tuition scholarships designated for rural students, along with a dedicated equipment budget to enhance camp resources. Designed for students ages 11-13, the camps were open to all students in the college's ten-county service area and held in four of their campus locations. In their first year, Walters State hosted 62 campers. Because the 2022 camps were such a hit, Walters State decided to go even bigger. They expanded to seven Basic camps, happening at all five campus locations, and even added two Advanced camps into the mix for the summer of 2023. That's a grand total of 116 students participating in camps this year, a whopping 46% more than the previous year!



“What does it take to make robotics work underwater? Underwater Robotic Camps will help campers answer this question. Our Underwater Robotic camps for rising 6th – 8th grades explore the underwater world of remote operated vehicles (ROVs) and the real-world applications of this exciting field. These 4-day camps aim to keep you busy both mentally and physically. Teams of campers will work together to design, build, and test a SeaMATE PufferFish ROV underwater robot. In addition, describe what a robot is and how robots are used to support work that has been traditionally performed by people.”

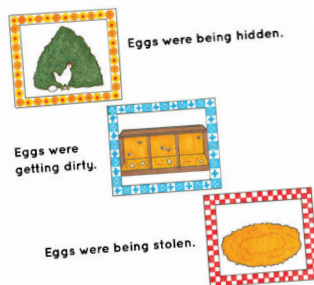
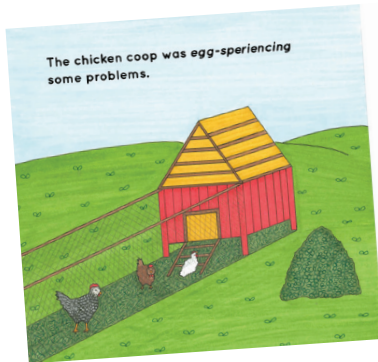


These camps immersed students in the world of STEM, sparked their entrepreneurial spirit, opened their eyes to exciting STEM careers, and forged strong connections within the community with the help of guest speakers and active community participation. With the success of camps this year, Walters State plans to continue to grow the underwater robotic camp program in the summer of 2024, including adding a level 3 camp! We are thrilled to be involved with this amazing program.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE COOP

We published a children's book! This is the first book for our RTF Library.

Every day, we work with rural school teachers and librarians to provide tools that help introduce more kids to the potential of tech-centric careers. Part of the mission includes helping students understand how people can use computers and other tech to solve real-world problems in an accessible way. "Thinking Outside the Coop," written and illustrated by Betsy Von Hagen, is just the story to do that.



This book, targeted at elementary school-aged children, is available to purchase on Amazon, with a portion of the proceeds going directly to the Rural Technology Fund. This funding allows us to provide technology education resources to more students in rural areas. We'll also be donating copies of this book to schools nationwide, accompanying our existing support to rural classrooms.

In addition to the book, Betsy compiled resources for educators to use with their students, organized by age group and available to everyone on our website. We are so thrilled at the response we have received for this book!

TECH PARTNERS

The RTF gained several new technology partnerships in 2023 that will benefit our educators!



Makey Makey is an invention kit for the 21st century that makes it easy to turn everyday objects into touchpads or keyboard keys and to combine the physical world with the digital. Educators who receive Makey Makey donations from the RTF receive a seat from Makey Makey in their Certified Educator Workshop!

VEX Robotics creates educational robotics for everyone. The VEX Robotics Continuum is a comprehensive platform for robotics education and competition that includes VEX 123, VEX Go, VEX IQ, VEX EXP, and VEX V5. Through this partnership, VEX will provide VEX Professional Development Plus (PD+) licenses to our educators leading VEX Robotics projects.



Sphero transforms the way kids PK-12 learn with a fun, comprehensive approach to STEAM and computer science. Their coding robots, design-and-build kits, curriculum, and engaging lessons and activities encourage exploration, imagination, and perseverance. Educators who receive Sphero products are eligible for professional development licenses for their products.

ASSISTIVE TECH

American Printing House for the Blind is a nonprofit organization that creates accessible learning experiences through educational, workplace, and independent living products and services for people who are blind and low vision. APH provides accessible and innovative products, materials, and services for lifelong success.

By connecting with them this year, we have opened new doors for our Assistive Tech applications, helping us reach more students across the US. One of their projects, the Code Jumper, is a physical system that teaches coding. Originally designed by Microsoft and developed by APH, this product takes block coding off the screen using plastic pods, oversized buttons, and cords.



OUR IMPACT

In 2023, the RTF placed

tech education resources into the hands of 15,011 students	assistive technology resources into the hands of 994 students	in a total of 70 schools and libraries
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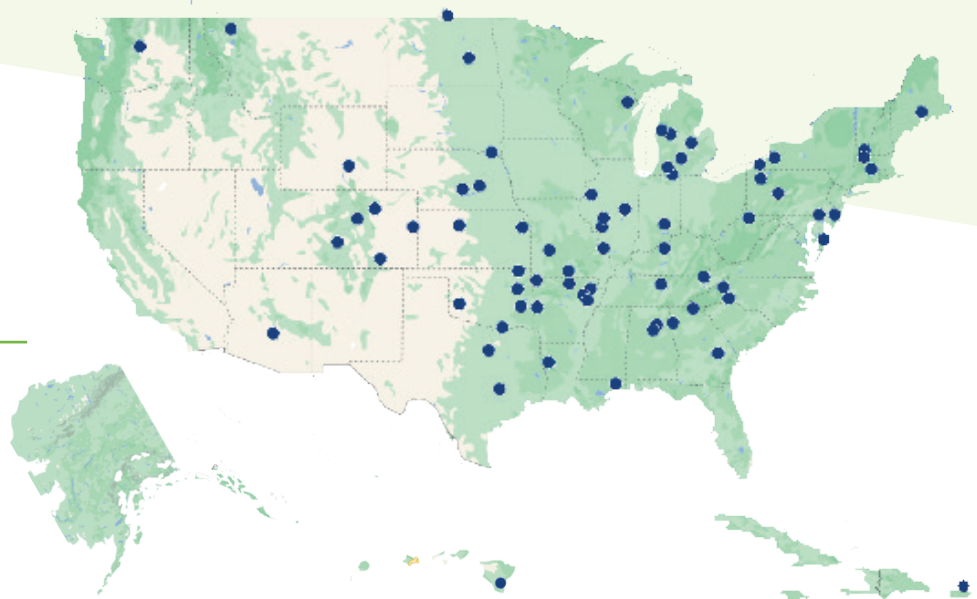


Bringing our total number of impacted students to

184,604

OUR REACH

The locations below represent where we provided technology education resources and assistive technology to rural classrooms and libraries this year.

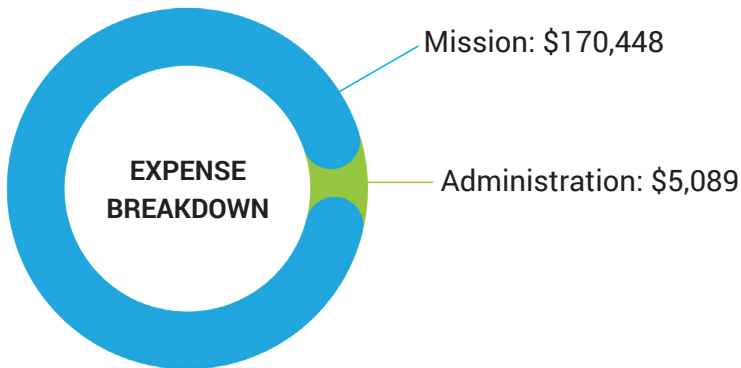


St Clair County	AL	Columbia	CT	Elizabethtown	KY	Gulfport	MS	Knox	PA
Chelsea	AL	Middletown	DE	Many	LA	Kalispell	MT	Altoona	PA
Harrisburg	AR	Tallapoosa	GA	Shelburne Falls	MA	Marion	NC	Corry	PA
Mountain View	AR	Toombs County	GA	Westhampton	MA	Dunseith	ND	Naranjito	PR
Mena	AR	Dahlonoga	GA	Snow Hill	MD	Jamestown	ND	Gaffney	SC
Farmington	AR	Naalehu	HI	Belfast	ME	Aurora	NE	Morristown	TN
McCroy	AR	Edwardsville	IL	Albion	MI	Kearney	NE	Woodbury	TN
Palestine	AR	Macomb	IL	White Pigeon	MI	Coleridge	NE	Rio Vista	TX
San Tan Valley	AZ	Arthur	IL	Howard City	MI	Mays Landing	NJ	Round Top	TX
Trinidad	CO	Carlinville	IL	Corunna	MI	Ellicottville	NY	Tom Bean	TX
Cheyenne Wells	CO	Noble County	IN	Hesperia	MI	Blair	OK	East Wenatchee	WA
Fairplay	CO	Seymour	IN	Bakersfield	MO	Tuskahoma	OK	Gillett	WI
Aurora	CO	Hays	KS	Bolivar	MO	Chelsea	OK	Clarksburg	WV
Lake City	CO	Baldwin City	KS	Perryville	MO	Oktaha	OK	Hanna	WY

RTF FINANCIALS AT A GLANCE

TOTAL INCOME AND CONTRIBUTIONS:
\$231,440

TOTAL EXPENSES:
\$175,537



GuideStar



SUPPORTING PARTNERS

Revolution Tier (\$20,000+)



Blackthorne

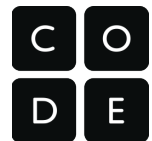
Innovation Tier (\$10,000+)



Opportunity Tier (\$5,000+)



COMMUNITY PARTNERS





How to Help

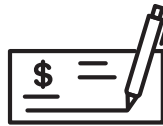
Your donation will go directly to supporting rural and economically disadvantaged students by providing computer science and engineering equipment, curriculum, scholarships, and assistive technology in classrooms and libraries across the country.



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