

SHELBURNE FALLS

COVID-19 Relief Fund helps West County families, schools

By **MARY BYRNE**
Staff Writer

SHELBURNE FALLS — A recently established fund is bringing remote learning tools to teachers and ensuring families have access to food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Mary Lyon Foundation — a nonprofit incorporated in 1991 to support all aspects of education in West County — established its COVID-19 Relief Fund to meet the unprecedented level of need caused by the global pandemic.

The fund is looking to raise \$40,000, and is over halfway there thanks to donations from a group of local sponsors, according to Susan Samoriski, executive director of the Mary Lyon Foundation. Those donations will provide a dollar-for-dollar match for every new donation the fund receives.

The goal is to secure sufficient funding to meet the needs of local schools for the long run, “as we know

there will be a prolonged impact on teaching and learning due to the coronavirus,” the foundation’s website states.

“We’re building the fund so that we can essentially take care of the basic needs of families with children and schools right now — schools that need any sort of curriculum material, especially geared toward remote learning,” Samoriski explained, adding that she gets daily emails from teaching staff in need of materials for remote teaching.

The nonprofit has regularly provided schools with books for their students, and teachers with markers and white boards. However, funding requests are adapting during the pandemic.

“Several teachers have asked for stamps and envelopes and stationary, so they can write letters to the students,” she added.

Samoriski said the foundation has also received requests for webcams so teachers can see their stu-

dents during video conference calls.

“Working remotely is incredibly difficult,” Samoriski said. “These are unprecedented times, and we aim to be there all the more to support the staff and children.”

The fund also aims to provide families with healthy food options, she said, and has put together 220 bags of groceries, which were distributed at West County schools.

Samoriski said she is confident the COVID-19 Relief Fund will meet its goal.

“People have been incredibly generous,” she said.

Donations can be made online through PayPal by visiting the COVID-19 Relief Fund page at marylyonfoundation.org, or by writing a check made payable to Mary Lyon Foundation and sending it to P.O. Box 184, Shelburne Falls, MA 01370. COVID-19 Relief Fund should be written in the memo line.