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Academic Success through the Peninsula Bridge Program

The Peninsula Bridge Program, founded by Les DeWitt, provides academic opportunities to middle school students from East Palo Alto, eastern Menlo Park, Redwood City and San Mateo by providing summer enrichment programs and offering full year scholarships at local independent schools such as Castilleja, Crystal Springs, Menlo School, Sacred Heart and Woodside Priory. The goal is to empower students to maximize their potential by providing academic opportunities.

PVF was an initial funder of the Peninsula Bridge Program in 1990 and has had a long-standing relationship with Les DeWitt through a variety of charitable projects. In addition, PVF created, and manages, a scholarship program for a donor interested in providing financial support to enable Peninsula Bridge participants to attend private schools.

For the thousands of students who have participated in the Program, whether in the summer program or as a full time student at these independent schools, Peninsula Bridge has had an enormous impact. Recently PVF received a compelling letter from Terrell Virgil, an East Palo Alto resident who graduated from Woodside Priory through the Peninsula Bridge Program:

“There is not a day that goes by that I do not thank the Lord for what I have. I was raised in East Palo Alto. The small city where hope to make it dwindles like a leaf in the wind by the time you reach your adolescence. Like most ghettos, racism, brutality, and playing sports are the undertow to how people operate. Education is

not at the top of the list. My father, Earl Virgil, was one of the exceptions. In East Palo Alto he was the peoples’ champ. He coached in the P.A.L. League and was the surrogate father to drug dealers and gangsters. My father raised me and my three brothers and cousin. Unfortunately my cousin was gunned down at the age of 19. My mother has for the most part not been in our lives. Odds would say I should be in prison, deceased or selling drugs. On the contrary my life has been quite the opposite for the last 10 years. Why? It is because of Peninsula Bridge, Les DeWitt and Woodside Priory Prep School.

Today, I am a graduate of Woodside Priory (the first African American to do so), as well as a graduate of the University of the Pacific. For the last 3 years, I have been with Wells Fargo, initially branch manager, member of the first corporate diversity council and a top producer. I am currently a mortgage consultant at Wells Fargo Home Mortgage and have purchased 2 homes in the last 3 years. Most importantly, I am married to my best friend Millie and we are expecting our son Ty Virgil on July 29, 2005.

My son will never know what it is like to grow up and live the life that I had to live. All of the wonderful opportunities that I have start with the Peninsula Bridge Program. Peninsula Bridge’s Les Dewitt gave me opportunity and Woodside Priory took away my ignorance and replaced it with intelligence, love and understanding. Les Dewitt saw something in me that only my Dad saw and he took a chance on me. The Bridge Program not only gave me an education, it gave me life. I know what life means, love, compassion, family and hard work. I thought that I was alive during my time in East Palo Alto until I was 16. I did not know it at the time but I was merely surviving. There is a big difference between the two. The Bridge Program made

life available to me. Thank you for all you have done for me and other inner city kids that you vouched for and took under your wings. Thanks to you, my future is bright.”

If you are interested in learning more about programs in your community such as the Peninsula Bridge Program, PVF services, or in supporting PVF, please contact Moira Walsh, PVF Associate Director.

PVF 2004 Annual Report

In 2004, PVF gave out \$5.2 million in grants to over 1,500 charitable projects. Much of this giving was “customized grantmaking” – charitable giving programs that PVF tailored to meet the specific interests of donors.

PVF’s grantmaking is wide-ranging and represents the varied interests of the donors we serve. In 2004, we made grants to support education, arts and culture, environment, community development, health, poverty, youth and international causes. The grants ranged in amount from \$300,000 to \$100. Grants were made predominantly in the San Francisco Bay Area, but also throughout the United States and the world.

PVF’s 2004 Annual Report will be distributed in July 2005. It contains a summary of all grants made, programs PVF created for donors, programs PVF initiated in response to community needs, and the spectrum of services PVF offers. Contact PVF if you have any questions or desire additional copies of the Report.