

# Investing for the Future



Members of the Black River Falls High School Tiger Investment Club (along with school leaders and community members) celebrate another successful year at their annual spring luncheon.

## Student-led investment club in Black River Falls gives back to the school district

Shelby Anderson

In 1997, Milt Lunda, president of Lunda Construction in Black River Falls, donated \$50,000 each to three school districts in Jackson County to start student-led investment clubs.

Today, only one of the schools — Black River Falls High School — still maintains its club. The Tiger Investment Club (TIC) is not only surviving but thriving.

Last school year, the club was able to donate \$11,000 to the school. Students within the club decide how to allocate the money. Interested teachers submit a grant request and students in the investment club vote on which requests they want to fund.

“That’s really fun,” said Club President Ethan Anderson. “That’s really the main focus of the club — to make improvements to the school.”

From the \$11,000, the club awarded 13 grants. Those grants helped purchase first aid kits, a light camera, Microsoft Office certifica-

tions, Lego manipulatives, and, among others, a Tibetan student scholarship. Isaac Cowles, vice president of the investment club, said one of the highlights of participating in the club is seeing all the different projects the club has funded. For instance, the club helped fund a hydroponic growing system in one of the science classrooms.

“It was cool walking in there and seeing the tomatoes growing and we can say we helped purchase that,” Cowles said.

The students take the investment club seriously. Depending on the market, they are responsible for more than \$100,000. The TIC portfolio hit a record high of \$120,000 in February. This responsibility is what makes the club special to students.

“I think it’s cool because we’re working with real money and our decisions actually have an effect on the school,” Anderson said. “It’s not like you just throw around fake money. We really put the best interest of the club first.”

### ► Policy Resources on Student Clubs

The WASB Policy Resource Guide (PRG) has a host of information and sample policies related to the administration of student clubs such as student activity funds management, volunteer coaches/advisors, and, among others, student fundraising activities. For more information, visit [WASB.org](http://WASB.org) (select “Publications & Products” and then “Policy”). The PRG is a subscription service providing in-depth policy information. All members have access to sample policies from other Wisconsin districts by contacting the WASB.

Club officers present the annual report: (from left) Ethan Anderson, Isaac Cowles, Chase Handy, and Rebecca Ross.



## Real World Investing

The club meets every Tuesday during the school year with almost 60 students participating in the club this past school year. “We discuss our current stocks, market trends, etc.,” said club advisor Jared Plaza. “Much of this is student-led, which makes it very easy for me because the students want to succeed.”

Plaza took over as club advisor two years ago when teacher Kris Wrobel retired. Wrobel advised the club for almost 20 years and helped it become successful.

love analytics due to my math education background,” Plaza said. “After the first meeting, I was hooked and Kris let me attend all of the meetings just like the students.”

When Wrobel decided to retire, Plaza was offered the position. “I felt very nervous advising a club that I wasn’t an expert on. Thankfully, Kris stayed on as a consultant for two years and helped me through a lot of the background work and preparation.”

Near the end of each school year, the club’s officers report on the previous year’s investments. School leadership, including the superintendent and school board, attend along with parents and some community members.

In addition to the investment club, Plaza advises another financial literacy club for students who are just starting in investing. Students learn about the stock market and investing through real-time stock market games and apps. This past school year, Plaza had 30 students in the beginning investing club.

Milt Lunda passed away in 2008 but his family continues to support schools in Jackson County. Milt’s son, Larry Lunda, said his father made the donation to the schools to get students interested in investing and financial planning.

“He thought students would be more interested if they were using real money rather than Monopoly money,” Lunda said. “I think it certainly gets them involved in investing. So much of life is just

about being exposed to and learning about different things.”

## Benefits of TIC

The club not only helps improve the school district but it can change students’ lives. Chase Handy, one of the club’s officers, said that when he began participating, he didn’t have any intention to study business or financial planning.

“Once I got into investing and learning about the market, it kind of helped me figure out what I want to do in the future,” he said. “Now I’m looking to go into business and financial advising.”

However, students don’t have to go on to study business to benefit from participating in the club.

“Students benefit in many ways from being in TIC,” Plaza said.

“From being able to take responsibility and ownership for the actions that transpire, to building relationships and having discussions about the current trend in the market and how it ties into the economy and current events, TIC is extremely beneficial.”

Cowles added that one of the hallmarks of the club is that investment decisions are really made by the entire club.

“Our discussions are really good,” he said. “Everyone votes and we decide what is best for the club for each individual investment.”

Plaza added that the reason he loves advising this club is the students. “The officers are always involved and we are in constant contact about our portfolio,” Plaza said. “The members have ideas all the time and do research to determine which stock to invest in next. The amount of responsibility and professionalism in this club is astounding.”

## ‘Raising an Awareness’

Superintendent Shelly Severson said financial literacy and investing is not something that very many students learn about at home. So a club like TIC is a good opportunity for students.

“It raises an awareness of what investing your money does for you



“We are so lucky in this community to have the generosity of the Lundas and have the foresight to make financial literacy a priority,” Wrobel said. “We want our kids to know how to save and invest.”

Plaza said he got involved with the club as a first-year teacher when he sat in on the meetings. “I didn’t know much about the market but I



**“They’re leaving our school district with their own financial goals.** They feel confident investing their own money. I’m so impressed with these students. When I talk with them, you can tell they have a deep knowledge in investing.” – *Mary Jo Rozmenoski, school board president*

and what possibilities exist,” she said.

This is especially important for a district like Black River Falls, which is located in one of the poorer counties in the state. Severson said one of the big lessons that students learn is that you don’t need a lot of money to start investing. Additionally, Severson is proud that the club attracts a cross section of students from different backgrounds.

“We have a very thriving and active investment club that crosses all economic groups,” she said. “I think that’s a huge credit to the program. It’s not just a club for the wealthy, it’s important knowledge and information for everyone.”

Mary Jo Rozmenoski, school

board president and WASB 2018 president, echoed Severson’s comments, adding that the club teaches students life-long lessons and skills.

“They’re leaving our school district with their own financial goals,” Rozmenoski said. “They feel confident investing their own money. I’m so impressed with these students. When I talk with them, you can tell they have a deep knowledge in investing.”

The Black River Falls School District actually has a long history of focusing on financial literacy. Wrobel pointed out that the district was one of the first school districts in the state to require an economics class. At that time, less than 10 percent of the schools in Wisconsin required eco-

nomics as a graduation requirement.

The club should continue on for some time. Financially, it’s sound, but more importantly, students and staff are proud of it. Anderson, who plans on studying business and financial planning in college, said he realized just how special the program was when he did his college visits. Many of the college programs he visited boasted that they had student-led investment clubs funded with real money.

“I learned that our club actually has more than a lot of college investment clubs,” he said. “I thought that was pretty cool for a small town like Black River Falls.” ■

*Shelby Anderson is editor of Wisconsin School News.*



## Policy Resource Guide

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