

Philanthropy goes local

By TENEILLE WATSON

A BUNBURY foundation is following in the footsteps of philanthropists Bill and Melinda Gates - but on a local scale.

The South West Community Foundation is encouraging South West businesses riding high on the economic boom to contribute to a fund which will be used to support community projects and activities.

The first of its kind in WA, the fund was kicked off earlier this year with a \$100,000 contribution from the State Government.

With donations already trickling in, including \$70,000 from Dale Alcock Homes South West and \$20,000 from Alcoa, the fund is expected to raise \$500,000 by the end of the year and have around \$2m in the kitty by the end of 2008.

South West Development Commission board member and foundation committee member David Trench said there were other businesses and community members who would be able to contribute to the fund.

"There are a lot of people and businesses making a lot of money out of the South West boom," Mr Trench said.

"Many of these people and businesses are happy to give back to the South West community. But in the past there has been a lack of opportunity to do that effectively.

"The foundation provides that mechanism."

The South West Development Commission's Jon Birch, who helped set up the project, said the foundation fund would give businesses and philanthropists a safe, efficient and effective way to invest back into the community.

"The concept is similar to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which aims to deal with global health issues in an effort to improve lives around the world," he said.

"The point is this community fund can make a huge difference."

One of the first projects to kick off with the help of the foundation is a "mobile youth space", a state-of-the-art caravan jam-packed with sport, musical and computer equipment that will provide and support youth activities for South West communities.

SWDC board member and foundation committee member Posy Barnes said the project showed how the foundation was a real community initiative.

"It is a great way for people who love the South West to give back to their community," she said.

For more information on the South West Community Foundation call Jon Birch on 9792 2023 or log on to www.swcf.org.au