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## TEAM SPRINGFIELD

Book-giving project benefits children, whole community

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No community can be successful without the willing support of its members. Here in Springfield, we are lucky to have a supportive community that recognizes the value of properly educating and mentoring our youth.

A great representation of Springfield's thriving community support is the Gift of Literacy project, a book-giving program funded predominately through community organizations and partners.

For the second year, TEAM Springfield has partnered with the Rotary Clubs of Springfield to give brand-new books to all 930 first-graders in Springfield Public Schools. Five other businesses and many individuals across Springfield have joined us to encourage literacy and instill a love of reading in our community's children.

The program began in fall 2005 when the Rotary Clubs approached Springfield Public Schools with the idea for a book-giving program benefiting all first-grade students. Implemented in June 2006 by a dedicated group of Rotary members and community partners, the first annual Gift of Literacy was a success. On June 1, all first-graders in Springfield Public Schools received a new, hardbound book.

Today marks the second annual Gift of Literacy event. In a literacy celebration generously hosted by Lane Community College, every first-grade student will again receive a brand-new book.

This year's program also gives students an additional reward - a reusable Gift of Literacy backpack. The backpacks are filled with items donated by sponsors, including rulers, pencils, pens and bookmarks. These backpacks are an example of the Gift of Literacy's continual growth. It is our goal to expand the program every year, reaching more students and providing them with a memorable literacy experience. Research indicates that reading interventions early in the life of a child are directly related to success in K-12 education and beyond.

Here in Springfield, for many high-need students, this may be the first new, hardbound book of their very own. We believe it is especially important to provide these students with educational resources for their homes.

Today all students will be presented with their favorite book from the collection of nine Gift of Literacy titles, rewarding their reading this school year and providing them with a book to read throughout the summer.

We see literacy as a community-wide effort and goal. We know that without a strong foundation in reading and comprehension, students cannot really succeed in any other subject area. The Springfield community identified literacy as a top priority in the Springfield Quality Education Model, a plan developed as a result of meetings involving more than 1,000 community members and civic organizations.

Here at TEAM Springfield we have identified literacy and quality schools as important components of a healthy community and are committed to supporting the Gift of Literacy for years to come.

Both the Springfield School Board and Springfield City Council have recognized the impact of community-wide support for our students by proclaiming May 31 as "Springfield Education Day."

The activities of the Gift of Literacy celebration will be the keynote event of this special day. Nearly 150 community volunteers and large donations totaling nearly \$40,000 will come together to make the second annual Gift of Literacy a success.

TEAM Springfield is proud to sponsor this wonderful program. It is truly indicative of how members of the Springfield community are dedicated to developing our students.

*This column was jointly written by Mayor Sid Leiken, Public Schools Board Chairman Gary Weber, Springfield Utility Board Chairwoman Bobbie Jean Adams and Willamalane Park & Recreation District Board Chairman Gary Ross.*