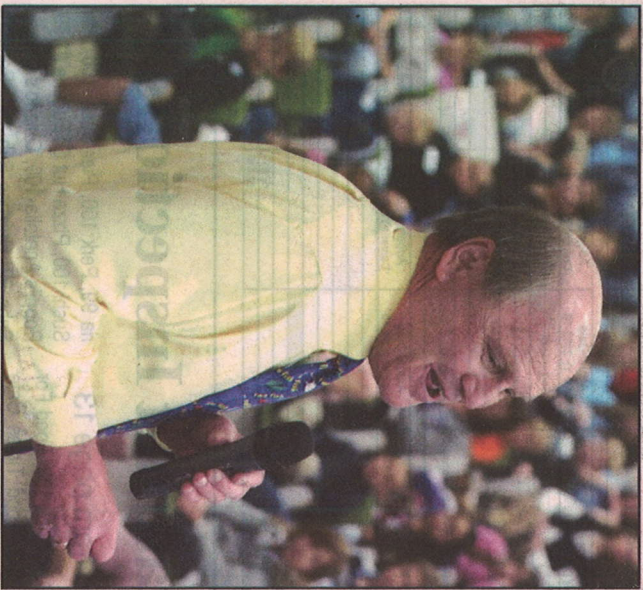


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John Jorgensen of Wyoming, the inspiration for Springfield's Gift of Literacy, speaks to Springfield first graders.



First graders from Page Elementary react to seeing mascots during the sixth annual Gift of Literacy.



Greg James from Springfield Public Schools was among the volunteers reading to children during the sixth annual Gift of Literacy event last Thursday at Lane Community College.

Gift of Literacy puts emphasis on reading

By Craig Murphy
Springfield Times Editor

EUGENE — There were the usual shrieks of joy last Thursday when some 800 Springfield first graders each got to hold their own new book.

It has become a favorite tradition during the Gift of Literacy, a program sponsored by local Rotary clubs and held at Lane Community College each year.

This year a new twist was added. Students who had the necessary paperwork filled out had their own Springfield Public Library cards waiting for them back at school.

Thus, a second round of shrieks.

"This is our first year of doing this," said Barbara Thompson, Youth and Adult Services manager at the library. "We hope to be able to sustain it. Eventually every child will have a free card."

In previous years, Thompson has been at Gift of Literacy events encouraging students to sign up for the library's summer reading program. This year, the sixth for the program, went one step further.

"This is an extension of the Gift of Literacy event," Thompson said. "This is an event that celebrates kids' literacy attainment in first grade. It seemed like a natural extension. It is perfect timing. Kids can take their cards right down to the library."

Britany Kronholm, program assistant for GOL, said it didn't take long to get going on the magic library cards idea.

"We jumped at the chance to get it started," Kronholm said.

"For kids to get a magic library card, we were really thrilled to make it happen. We also got support from Wildish. Kids outside of city limits get cards free for a year thanks to Wildish, which

would be \$70 otherwise."

Like Thompson, Kronholm enjoyed the reaction from students.

"You could hear the big roar when kids got the books and again when they heard about the card," Kronholm said. "It's perfect for the summer. We want to get kids into the summer reading program. We hope this makes a big impact on the students."

All first graders in Springfield take part in GOL, which typically takes place a couple of weeks before school is out. The last day of school this year is next Wednesday, June 15.

"We're going to find out the response soon," Thompson said. "We're hoping we get a lot of kids and families coming to the library that may not have thought about us before."

Per usual, last week's GOL program broke the first graders up into three groups that came to

LCC at a different time. Students got to meet characters Clifford the Big Red Dog, Toot and Puddle, Skippyjon Jones and Sluggo, the Eugene Emeralds mascot, before heading into the forum.

The students heard from John Jorgensen, a Wyoming resident who started a literacy program in honor of his late wife. Springfield's program is modeled on what Jorgensen started.

Each student then received a new book bag with the book they selected earlier in the school year. Following that and the announcement about the library cards, students went into another building where volunteers read books. Before heading back to school, the students had lunch.

One of the volunteer readers was Mary Newell-DePalma, author of "The Perfect Gift," one of 10 books students could choose from. Newell-DePalma flew in from Boston to take part.

"We're witnessing children's emerging competence in reading, a tool they'll be able to use the rest of their lives," the author said. "That's very special. They were very engaged, a very attentive audience. I never met an author as a child. I like them to know an author is someone that could be their neighbor."

Sarah Lewenberg, principal at Guy Lee Elementary, said the day is fun for all involved. "It's fabulous," Lewenberg said. "The kids are pretty darn excited. We had to remind most of them to walk. They know they're getting backpacks and books. When they get back to school, most of the kids spend the rest of the day reading their new books. Our teachers look forward to this every year. It's part of our tradition now."

Each year students get to choose their book from a list of 10 books. Kronholm said 25 books are being looked at already for next year's event, with the final 10 expected to be known by the end of July. "As soon as we see books, we contact authors if they'd be willing to come," Kronholm said. "We've allly fortunate to have able to make it."

Of the approximately 300 students, Kronholm said, was "the most popular book, by 300 students, was 'Tail.' The book is part of a popular book last year. It's a non-fiction book. It's new because the book is hearing-based. It was the most popular book. It was the most popular book."

Jeff DeFranco, director of Communications for Springfield Public Schools, noted it was more exciting. "The magic library cards are the doors to all kinds of books," DeFranco said. "It's one thing, but access is what it's all about."

Photos by Craig Murphy/Springfield Times



Springfield first graders grab their new books during the sixth annual Gift of Literacy event last Thursday at Lane Community College.