

A few good books?

Donations build up classroom libraries

By Al Sullivan
Reporter senior staff writer

The idea to seek donations of books from outside the school to build up classroom libraries in the elementary schools evolved out of the office of Superintendent Dr. Patricia McGeehan and a few people she gathered together for the purpose of celebrating National Library Week last November.

Once rolling, however, the program has snowballed into an avalanche of reading materials that kids throughout the school district can take home to read.

mentary schools over which Whitney is supervisor, but also the high school.

The variety of books astounded Whitney because they cover a huge area from children's and illustrated books to classic novels and other young fiction, even non-fiction.

"Dr. McGeehan and the Literacy Committee came up with this," Whitney said. "The idea was to build up the classroom libraries by getting parents to donate books."

But the program grew so that local businesses and civic groups soon also got involved, donating books and money with which to purchase books.

"Every classroom has its own library and students are encouraged to borrow the books. We just want them to read." – Deborah Whitney

The Bayonne Book Buddies Program was designed to promote a love of reading, said Deborah Whitney, who serves as the coordinator for the Elementary School Libraries and Home Instruction.

This reading does not always have to go on in the schools, but – Whitney said – should go on out in the community as well.

"Once a child learns to love reading, that child becomes a better student," Whitney said.

While the campaign was designed to have parents and others bring books to the school during the month of November, books still trickle into the school, serving not only the ele-

Donations provided more than 500 books to Washington School alone – some of them new, some of them used, but all of them in good condition.

Whitney distributed them, usually setting up a room with the books laid out on a table. Teachers come from each of the classrooms to choose what they need, or they bring back books they no longer need in their classroom library.

"We have mostly fiction," Whitney said. "But we got a lot of non-fiction, too."

The money donated allowed Whitney to attend the Scholastic Book Fair in Central



A ROOM FULL OF BOOKS – Parents and school officials gathered at Washington School to look over the more than 500 books collected as part of the Book Buddies program.

Jersey in January, where she was able to purchase many more books at significant discounts.

Whitney and her assistants go through the donated books, sorting them for what is age- and subject-appropriate, then allow the teachers to take what they need to stock their classroom libraries.

"Every classroom has its own library and students are encouraged to borrow the books," she said. "We just want them to read."

"This is the first year the school district is doing this," she said, "but hopefully, we can do this every year and designate November for donating books."

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A lot of parents are involved in all of the 11 elementary schools, Whitney said, a key to making the program work.

But with the loan of the book also comes the responsibility for the student to take care of it.

"That's part of the lesson in responsibility," she said.

Books can be used in the classroom as part of a lesson, but the books can also be taken home to read during the student's time off from school.

"A lot of students don't have any books at home," Whitney said. "This assures that a student has access to books."

Parents have been generous in their donations. Some who could not part with their children's favorite books, purchased copies to donate. Other parents donated books they had had around the house for years.

Matt Doran, who had a son in the school system, is president of the Bayonne Lions Club — which donated \$200 to the program this year. The company for which he works, In-Line Air Conditioning of Bayonne, matched it.

"We met with Dr. McGeehan and we (Lions Club) were looking for a way to contribute, she suggested we donated to the book program. She said it would have a big impact."

Irene Dwyer, owner of Bayonne-based Comforts of Home, collected more than 200 books for Horace Mann School from her customers.

"Since there are homes out there that do not have enough invigorating learning materials, I am hoping that the books collected through the Book Buddies program will play an important role in family and lifelong learning," Dwyer said, noting that education is the key for people to advance in society. □

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