

Rolling Readers Space Coast has an uplifting impact on children through 'Read Aloud' and other programs; 'Readers on the Red Carpet' fundraiser

By Ken Datzman

Over the past two decades, the work of the dedicated, mission-driven volunteers of Rolling Readers Space Coast Inc., a nonprofit literacy organization, has had a profound impact on area children at one of the most important times in their lives.

Rolling Readers unites Brevard County elementary-aged children with books and caring adults to promote a community of lifelong readers. The volunteers work with classroom teachers.

The organization has one of the smallest nonprofit budgets in the region, yet its impact in the community is huge, thanks to its volunteer corps.

The volunteers work with children, both individually and in groups, to develop their desire to read, improve their reading skills, grow their imagination, and make a lasting impact on their lives.

Rolling Readers has three successful programs operating in Brevard Public Schools. They are designed for prekindergartners through sixth-graders. The programs are Read Aloud, Tutor/Mentor, and Grade Level Reading Intervention. The latter is a small group program for third-graders. The curriculum runs 16 weeks, 35 to 40 minutes per session.

Read Aloud is Rolling Readers flagship program. "Our largest program by far is 'Read Aloud.' Our organization started with that one program," said educator Cordelia "Coco" Wood, a program coordinator and staff accountant who has been with Rolling Readers Space Coast for eight years.

"Last year 151 Read Aloud volunteers were in 23 Brevard County schools. Breaking it down, we had 234 classrooms where Read Aloud volunteers participated. They served 4,107 students through that one program."

Wood works alongside colleague Lynne Rover, a program coordinator in her sixth year with Rolling Readers. Both Wood and Rover had been on the front lines of all three programs.

The organization was founded by Mary Eason, Polly Cordell, and Joan Borders. "They belonged to the American Association of University Women," said Wood. "There was a project Polly was looking into as part of AAUW and she located an organization in California called Rolling Readers. She contacted them and later Rolling Readers Space Coast was incorporated and was launched. Brevard Public Schools provides us with office space. That's how we are able to survive. We have about a \$130,000 budget."

One way Rolling Readers raises funds is through community events. The organization will host its fourth annual "Readers on the Red Carpet" benefit from 6:30-9 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 2, at the new Space Coast Health Foundation's Center for Collaboration in Rockledge. "This is a new site for the event. We're hoping for a big turnout," said Wood. There will be a champagne reception from 6:30-7 p.m. United Launch Alliance has donated a "VIP Launch Viewing" package that will be raffled at the fundraiser.

The event will celebrate Rolling Readers' 2018 Community Literacy Advocates. The Advocates include Corky Calhoun, senior pastor, Georgianna United Methodist Church; Moses Harvin Sr., president and CEO, American Services Technology Inc.; and Susan Thomas, who recently retired as executive director of Rolling Readers Space Coast.

Rolling Readers just appointed Michael Payne to



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Cordelia 'Coco' Wood, right, and Lynne Rover are program coordinators at Rolling Readers Space Coast Inc. The nonprofit entity is in its 21st year. Last school year, more than 4,000 youngsters in Brevard Public Schools participated in the organization's Read Aloud program. Volunteers read to the students. Rolling Readers will host its annual 'Readers on the Red Carpet' fundraiser Nov. 2 at the new Space Coast Health Foundation's Center for Collaboration in Rockledge.

succeed Thomas. Payne's career includes extensive experience as a nonprofit executive in Florida leading faith-based organizations.

Individual tickets to the event are \$100. Sponsorships start at \$500 and include various amenities at each level of support. Tickets are sold at rollingreadersspacecoast.com/readersontheredcarpet. To inquire about sponsorships, call the Rolling Readers office at 254-9976.

The vision of the three founders 20 years ago to help youngsters gain reading skills early in life has encouraged volunteers to be part of the program. Some volunteers have been with Rolling Readers 15 years or more. For example, Kaye Koines has been a Read Aloud volunteer at Cape View Elementary School in Cape Canaveral for 20 years.

Her work and that of many other volunteers in the three programs during the 2017-2018 school year totaled 11,466 hours. Of that number, 9,594 hours were for the Read Aloud program.

The estimated in-kind volunteer service provided to the

community for all the programs totaled \$283,095 last school year, based on an hourly rate of \$24.69, according to the newly released Rolling Readers Space Coast annual report.

The Read Aloud volunteers go through orientation and training. In just 30 minutes to an hour each week, the volunteers share their joy of reading and assist children in developing better reading skills.

Under the watchful eyes of the teacher, who remains in the classroom during the session, the volunteers read books from different literary genres, introduce new vocabulary, reinforce the importance of sequence, and much more. They support the work of the teachers.

"The volunteers engage the students," said Wood, who has a master's degree in elementary education and once was part of AmeriCorps VISTA, a national service program.

"It gives the students in the classrooms another

Please see Rolling Readers Space Coast, page 19

Rolling Readers Space Coast

Continued from page 12

opportunity to see an adult read. The work of the volunteers really enhances the students' overall experiences. The students see the importance of being able to read, and they see what reading can do for them. The volunteers love what they do."

She said Rolling Readers is currently recruiting volunteers. The volunteers range from age 18 and up. "We recruit volunteers throughout the school year. The volunteers enjoy our program so much, they may read to three different classes or they may tutor first and then go read to a class."

To learn more about volunteering for Rolling Readers, visit rollingreadersspacecoast.com or call the office at 254-9976.

The volunteers in the program are special people to the students, many of whom attend Title 1 schools in the county.

"One morning as I walked down the hall to my first kindergarten class, I was followed by two little guys," said Susan Lundberg, a Rolling Reader volunteer at Port Malabar Elementary School. "I heard one say to the other, 'That's the 'Book Lady.' She's going to Mrs. C's class to read.' I can't think of a better way to start my morning and what a wonderful title to be called."

Helen Hanesworth, a Rolling Reader volunteer at Sabal Elementary School in Melbourne, made this comment about her volunteer experience with the program.

"Memorable moments occur for me every week that I walk through the classroom door and see the excitement and enthusiasm on their faces. They have such a curiosity of what new books I have brought to read and are like little sponges listening to every word. When I end, there is usually one or two students who will say, 'You are really a

good reader, Mrs. Helen,' or 'You pick the best books, Mrs. Helen.' There's no greater satisfaction in the world than that."

The classroom teachers at the various schools embrace the volunteers of Rolling Readers. Carole Morton is a Rolling Reader volunteer at Croton Elementary School in Melbourne, where Anita Shinn is a teacher.

"My students look forward to her visit every week and her selection of books is perfect," said Shinn. "I am happy to be involved in such a wonderful organization. My students often pretend to be Mrs. Morton, sitting in a chair reading to their classmates, dolls, and even stuffed animals. She is an excellent role model."

It is widely accepted that reading aloud is the single most important researched activity leading to language development, and promotes early literacy skills in children. Researchers say what happens during the first few years sets the path for the rest of the child's life.

Reading is a fundamental skill. A child's ability to read proficiently by third grade is the most significant indicator of his or her school success, high-school completion, and future economic stability, according to early childhood research.

Even as cutting-edge research continues to reinforce the importance of brain development from birth to age 8, a survey conducted by YouGov finds that fewer than half (46 percent) of parents read aloud to their children every day, and only 34 percent do so for at least 15 minutes.

Fewer than one in 10 parents reported reading aloud daily for 15 minutes from birth, as recommend by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"Today, it's not unusual for both parents to be working. If there is not an older sibling in the household or another

individual who has the time to sit down and read to a child, the child will probably not have this experience. We help fill that void a lot of times. It's not just about reading to succeed. It's also about reading for enjoyment. Reading helps you grow in many ways. Your imagination gets enhanced and much more," said Wood, adding that the readers incorporate STEM into their reading sessions.

Rolling Readers conducts surveys and measures progress of the students. The information is included in the organization's annual report.

The latest site-coordinator survey results include: "100 percent believe the Read Aloud program is either 'very effective' or 'effective' in contributing to students' exposure to literature and improved reading skills." That's just a sampling of the positive responses from the Rolling Readers survey.

"We measure everything. We have to know how the program is working for the students in the schools. We also get the test scores from the teachers for the kids we are tutoring, which shows how the program is helping those struggling readers become better readers," said Wood.

Now in its 21st year, Rolling Readers has uplifted the lives of tens of thousands of young students in Brevard Public Schools. In fact, it has engaged more than 110,000 students since its founding in 1997. With the help of community partners, it has gifted more than 134,000 books to area children.

"Our community partners play an important role in the success of Rolling Readers Space Coast. With everyone working together in the community — the volunteers, community partners, and teachers — we can help make a difference in the classrooms of Brevard County Public Schools," said Wood.

cia

REAL ESTATE

CIA-DEVELOPERS.COM

Over 1.5 Million Sq. Ft.
in Brevard & Volusia
Counties

Aaron Anderson
Aaron@CIA-developers.com

321.723.3400
EXT 208

FOR SALE OR LEASE 9,807 SQ. FT. 5151 Babcock Street, Palm Bay, FL 32905



EXCELLENT LOCATION!

- 📍 Babcock Street Frontage
- 📍 Main Travel Corridor with Over 30,000 Cars Per Day
- 📍 6.1 Miles from Orlando Melbourne International Airport Terminal
- 📍 Convenient to I-95 & US-Hwy 1
- 📍 1 Hour from Orlando International Airport

FOR LEASE: \$15.62 SQ. FT. PLUS CAM

- Built in 2012
- Stand Alone 9,807 Sq. Ft. Facility
- Offices with Moveable Walls
- Café & Kitchen
- Babcock Street Frontage with Back-lit LED Signage
- Over 30,000+ Cars Per Day & 43,000 Residents Within 3 Miles
- Neighboring Land May Be Purchased with Building

5151 BABCOCK STREET
SALE PRICE:
\$1,500,000

With neighboring lot,
5131 Babcock Street:
\$1,799,000