

By Mary Jo Toenges

It seems like one of our biggest goals in life while we're working is to retire. It was mine. After I retired, my husband and I moved here from Indiana. I found that I didn't have anything to do that gave me a purpose. I was fortunate enough to attend one of our Women's Club Luncheon's where Linda Nickerson came to speak about the Littleton Elementary School Excellence in Education Program, she, her sister Pam (who had been a teacher) and their friend Nancy Liebner started four years ago. They saw a need to begin a program to increase literacy in a local elementary school. This was the beginning of an amazing year and now the beginning of my second year of being involved with the kids at the Dr. Carrie B. Robinson Littleton Elementary School. Many of these kids are at or below the poverty level. Many are from one parent homes. They need a great deal of help developing their math and reading skills. Some of the second-grade students I worked with last year couldn't read. The best thing that I feel I helped with last year is that one of the second-grade students is now sounding out words and reading. He smiles big at me and hugs me every time I see him this year in the cafeteria. Another great moment was when I worked for several weeks with a student to spell his name. I walked into the room one day and he smiled at me with his big toothless grin and spelled his name. These are the moments that give me a purpose in my life.

This year Littleton Elementary School has 640 students. Of those students, a fifth of them are students who can't speak English or speak very little English. They are placed in the regular classrooms with the other students. Fortunately for us, there are bilingual students who are always more than willing to help us translate.

We are looking for volunteers in several areas at Littleton Elementary School. It does not have to be a huge time commitment; some volunteers volunteer for a few hours a week.

WHAT CAN VOLUNTEERS DO?

Become a Book Buddy: Purchase **two new soft-cover books** for your assigned kindergarten or first grade student four times during the school year **and** enclose a short letter to the child each time. (Note: You do not go into the school.) This year, we are only providing books to Kindergarten and First Grade (all of them). We feel that it is most impactful to get our kids off to a great start.

Become an In-school Volunteer: Go into the school to volunteer time as:

- A **student mentor** developing a one-on-one relationship with a student with Guidance Counselor support
- A **tutor** helping improve student's skills or proficiency in Math, Reading and/or Science
- A **library aide** helping with day-to-day library operation, possibly help run a student book club, possibly conduct book talks and/or assist students and teachers selecting books.
- A **classroom volunteer** in kindergarten, upper grades, the art or music room.
We need volunteers to help in all grades, both reading and math. We now have two new self-contained classrooms in need of volunteers. A self-contained classroom is for children with special needs, that could be emotional or learning delayed.
- Spend a couple of hours a week **reading with a challenged reader**. You would be amazed at the improvements a child can make with one-on-one help.

Become a Donor:

- Donate money to help buy items for the school library
- Purchase items for the Christmas gift project where every student in the school receives a book, a game and an art item at the student's age level from the Amazon Christmas Wish List by using the following full address:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/2ECKYF4N9K17X?ref_=wl_share

Donations can be made payable to our 501(c)(3) non-profit, c/o LEEEP (Littleton Elementary Excellence in Education Program, Inc.), 20872 Wheelock Drive, North Fort Myers, FL 33917. Tax receipts are available, per request.

Remark of the day from a student, "I couldn't wait for school to start so I could come to the library." This remark belongs to all the volunteers who make this program what it is, whether you are a reading buddy, volunteer, or donor, you are making a difference in so many children's lives. If ever any of you would like to see our library in person, send me an email to Linda Nickerson, *President, Littleton Elementary Excellence in Education Program, Inc.* at lknickerson@yahoo.com and we can make arrangements!

If you are interested in participating, please contact Mary Jo Toenges. I live at 19334 Congressional Court 13C, phone 260-557-9300, email is mjtoenges@yahoo.com.