

The Salem Family YMCA works to promote literacy

The organization aims to instill a lifelong love of books in children and encourage family literacy.

By Cathy Crocker

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Summer child care at has a added a new twist at five YMCA sites. It's called Active Literacy and although school is out, learning continues.

The programs at elementary schools Brush College, Cummings, Harritt, McKinley, and St. Joseph are designed to enhance reading among 130 students. Rather than focusing on rote drills or the mechanics of reading, the program's goal is to instill a lifelong love of books. After selecting the age appropriate books, the YMCA developed corresponding activities with arts and crafts, food preparation, group discussions, skits and more to enhance the book's impact.

"My daughter thought it was fabulous. She loved that the reading program made Y care come together as a group to do the same thing. She was also excited every day to go and compare with her friends about the last nights reading," said Nancy Graber, parent at McKinley YMCA School Age Program.

Kiara, age 10, said "I loved the Moon Pie Craft. It was fun to read Jimmy Zangwow's Out-of-This-World Moon Pie Adventure and make moon pies." Kiara attended Englewood Elementary YMCA School Age Program.

Kelsey Cauley, YMCA School Age Site Director Morningside Elementary, said, "Kids loved reading time, and were excited about being able to take the books home. The kids really got into doing the crafts that tied into the books."

The YMCA received a small grant from the Marion County Children and Families Commission to use for this project. The grant was part of the Marion County literacy initiative, *Reading for All*, which supports student and lifelong success.

Jodi Blackman, YMCA Childcare Director, noted that when they first received the books, the kids seemed to be hesitant to read after they were out of school. Then, with the help of the Site Directors, they got excited and wanted to compare with each other how much they had read every day, almost making a contest of it.

The YMCA intends to continue the program into the fall and would like to expand it to more childcare sites. YMCA School Age Site Director at Cummings

Elementary Michelle Witbeck said, "It's a very positive program. Children and parents were very excited about it, and were behind it 100%!"

A survey recently completed by students involved showed an increase in love of reading for fun and an increased average amount of time reading per day.

The YMCA also encouraged the youth to take the books home and read with their siblings or parents. This is part of the YMCA's second effort -- family literacy. "Parents are a child's first teacher, and it's important to be a good reading role model," said Blackman.

In addition, the Salem YMCA downtown facility now provides a space in their lobby for adults to read to children as they may be waiting for a sibling who is in swim or dance classes. Through community bookdrives and donations from *Reading for All*, they are able to give away free books to families that want to have age appropriate books in their homes for their children.

For more information on *Reading for All*, please visit www.Reading4All.com or call Cathy Crocker at (503) 588-7975.