

# Private libraries: Book Buddies program gives area students the gift of book ownership to help keep their reading skills sharp over the summer

By STEPHANIE STEVENS/The Lufkin News | Posted: Monday, June 5, 2017 12:30 am

HUDSON — Fourth-grader Natalie Murray stood, practically drooling, over the hundreds of books stacked on tables at Bonner Elementary.

“I’m so excited to read ‘Maya the Happy Fairy’ she said, clutching 10 other books tightly to her chest. “I don’t normally read during the summer, but I can read these books.”

All the children at Bonner Elementary, about 650 students, received 11 books each from the Book Buddies of East Texas nonprofit organization near the end of the school year to read over the summer.

Dianna Anderson founded the organization in 2016 to serve East Texas’ children by providing them with their own books.

Anderson said over the summer, teachers ask students to read 10 to 15 minutes every day to help keep up their reading skills.

“If students do not have books to read many fall academically behind,” Anderson said. “Over time, these summer reading losses add up, and can put the student at risk. The Book Buddies program is dedicated to changing this scenario by giving each student the opportunity to select at least six books they are interested in and will enjoy reading. The best part of all, the books are free and theirs to keep.”

She was inspired by a nonprofit in Houston that partners with Hudson ISD to provide free books to at-risk elementary-age students.

“I saw what a difference this organization is making in Houston and I thought East Texas children should have the same opportunity,” Anderson said. “I grew up in a book-loving home, so it was difficult for me to believe that for many households, owning books is a luxury and not a reality.”

Throughout this school year, Book Buddies distributed more than 17,600 books, in both English and Spanish, to students in the Hudson ISD, Central ISD and Pineywoods Community Academy. More than 6,000 books went to the Rotary Club.



## Book Buddies

Joanna Bledsoe, Bonner Elementary Parent Teacher Organization volunteer, helps Remi Radke, left, and Natalie Murray, right, pick out books at Bonner Elementary.

Bonner Elementary Librarian Media Specialist Robin Collmorgen said these books will make a huge difference for the children this summer.

“It is so important that students continue to read during the summer because that’s when their reading level falls,” she said. “If you don’t use those reading skills you lose them.”

Fourth-grader Joshua Harris said it was “cool” that there were books from all over the U.S. to choose from. Collmorgen pointed out that one book was from Newport, Arkansas, from the Jackson County Library.

“I’m excited to read the books,” Harris said. “I have one for my baby brother, one for my sister and one for me.”

Earlier this year, Pineywoods Community Academy Primary Literacy Coordinator Deanna Prunes had classes come in and write their names in the books to instill ownership and pride.

Kids could grab a pair of fun glasses, read together and get their picture taken.

PCA second-grader Asia Whitaker found several books.

“I got a finding book where you find pictures and things and I got ‘Amelia Bedelia’ and ‘The Guinea Dog’ book,” she said. “I like ‘Amelia Bedelia.’”

She said she wanted to read more at home with her sister.

“I feel happy to take these books home,” she said. “This makes me want to read even more. You know you can learn a whole lot by reading.”

She pointed out that many students are finding books for their family members, “which is really special because it’s not just benefiting the students, but the whole family.”

Prunes said many students don’t have books at home.

“Books are expensive and we have technology and the internet,” Prunes said. “Books are in some ways sadly becoming a thing of the past. So it’s exciting to see students pick out books and for them to write their names in it and have ownership. They will get to build their own little libraries at home.”

All Title 1 schools in East Texas are eligible for the program, according to the Book Buddies website, [zimmcom.net/bookbuddies/about.html#mission](http://zimmcom.net/bookbuddies/about.html#mission).

Schools qualify based on the percentage of school children that participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Book Buddies collects books year round with the help of volunteers who count, sort, box and inventory the books for distribution to the individual schools. All that is asked is that each school provide volunteers, boxes and transportation of the books from the warehouse to the school.

Joanna Bledsoe, Bonner Elementary Parent Teacher Organization volunteer, has been volunteering since October.

“We had about 20 different moms and teenagers go through these books in October when I helped,” Bledsoe said. “We went through 14,000 books in these gigantic crates. They went to different schools and each school got a certain amount compared to how many students were at each school. Bonner Elementary got a little over 7,000 books.”

According to Anderson, without the help of many volunteers who came from the Angelina College basketball team, National Honor Societies and many different departments in the schools, she wouldn't have been able to distribute the books.

More information about volunteering is available on the website, she said.

“Thank you in advance for donating your time and playing such an important role in helping transform the lives of East Texas children through the power of book ownership,” Anderson said.

Anderson also thanked the Better World Books, which donated the majority of the books.

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