

SAN LUIS COUNTY LIBRARY

PARTNERSHIPS IN BAD ECONOMIC TIMES

By Margaret Kensinger-Klopfer, Youth Services SLO County Library

AS A LIBRARIAN, YOU ARE never sure of the direct impact of what you do. Every year the library works hard to encourage children and teens to read over the summer through the Summer Reading Program. This program offers prizes, book bags, free books and free shows to families throughout San Luis Obispo County at the local public library. Research has shown that encouraging children to read over the summer improves communities, schools, and children's ability during the following school year. With increasing government budget crunches, reduced staff, and increased interest in the program, the library tries to reach the most kids with decreased funding. All the research in the world cannot replace the stories of people who can testify to how you have helped them.

Two years ago a mother came into the library after our Summer Reading Program had ended and told us how much she loved what the library did. She wanted to let us know the positive impact of the library on her own life. Her daughter loved the Summer Reading Program, and it inspired her to read wonderful books. This mother also wanted to give back to the program. She was Jennifer Melton, CEO of Cloud Star, which locally produces organic pet supplies.

Melton said her company would be willing to donate over 4,000 reusable canvas book bags to children who read during the summer as a part of her company's policy of charitable giving. The cost of the bags would have been far outside of our small government Summer Reading budget, but through this positive community partnership with Cloud Star, we are now able to give out a canvas bag to every child who reads during the summer. The program has expanded to include an annual art competition for local artists to design the artwork for the book bags.

The partnership between Cloud Star and San Luis Obispo County Library reflects a new corporate mentality of community improvement during an era of government cutbacks.

Many other businesses like Target, Applebees and Round Table Pizza dedicate a significant portion of their profits back to their communities. Target recently gave a grant to the San Luis Library to promote literacy and provide free books in Spanish to kids that attend the Libros y Cantos storytime.

Embracing the spirit of "pay it forward," the library has recently formed a partnership to help other non-profits in the San Luis Obispo area seeking funding. The San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation worked with library staff to select an online database, www.GrantStation.com. Grant Station offers

nonprofits and government agencies the opportunity to identify potential funding sources for their programs and projects and helps with grant seeking and writing. The Community Foundation provides funding to subscribe to Grant Station, and seven library branches now have it available to the public for no charge and will also train people to use it. Who knows what stories will be written from this new partnership? For more information, visit www.slolibrary.org or call Margaret Kensinger-Klopfer, Head of Youth Services at 805-781-5775.



Youth Services Director Margaret Kensinger-Klopfer (in the rear) with kids from Hawthorne Elementary who received Cloud Star bags.



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