

'Heroes' hit the books for literacy night

By Stacey Barchenger

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Hammond Elementary School librarian Ellen Susee knows the thousands of books in the school library.

But even those weren't enough for a literacy event held at the northeast Salem school Thursday, and Susee had to borrow books from other libraries to pair them with guest readers.

Reading is "tremendously important," she said. "Anything the schools can do to make reading important is the best."

Hundreds of Hammond students and their parents attended the annual event and played games, ate free hot dogs, watched a helicopter buzz overhead, exchanged books and listened to local "heroes" read.

Susee picked out books that related to the heroes' careers. For example, Steve Westberg, a flight instructor with Corvallis Aero Service, read "The Little Airplane" by Lois Lenski.

Some readers read their own books. Hammond fifth-grader Skyla Ziglinski read her own book "The Star Story," written during her writing class. It took three weeks to write the story of a golden retriever that learns an ultimate lesson of listening to others.

"I like writing," Ziglinski said. "It lets my imagination flow through it."

It takes 170 volunteers to pull off the annual event, organizer Sarah Hayden said.

"The purpose is to promote literacy throughout not only our school but the community," she said. "We in Salem-Keizer School District are committed to literacy."

Community heroes were invited to read to groups of children to show the importance of literacy. They represented Salem Fire Department, Marion County Sheriff's Office, high school athletes, the Oregon National Guard and local government officials and authors.

Another hero was gubernatorial candidate and former Portland Trailblazer Chris Dudley, who read his own book "Chris Dreams Big" which he self-published with his wife in the past year.



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Steve Westberg, a flight instructor with Corvallis Aero Service, reads "The Little Airplane" to children during Literacy Night at Hammond Elementary School.

"Reading is so important with children," he said. "I think this is a great idea to encourage that."

Former Hammond students Tony Phong, 12, Marlo Plater, 13, and Demeris Bailey, 12, volunteered at the event, although they now attend Stephens Middle School.

They volunteered because it's important to help younger children to learn to read, Plater said.

"If you couldn't read, how could you do anything?" Plater said.

sbarchenge@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6610