

## Volunteers rock and read to kids

By Russ Corey

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**SHEFFIELD** - Bobby Long sits in a double-wide rocking chair in the hallway of Threadgill Primary School, a Dr. Seuss book in his hands.

To his right is a first-grade boy. To his left, a first-grade girl. They listen attentively as he reads from the book.



Long is one of several people from the community participating in the Rockin' Readers program, which was made possible through a grant from Cracker Barrel Restaurants.

Bobby Long reads a book to first-graders Sladen Hester and Jaliyah Jackson. Long is one of the Rockin' Readers at Threadgill Primary School in Sheffield. The school received a grant for the two rockers and a barrel-shaped book shelf from Cracker Barrel Restaurants.

*Daniel Giles/TimesDaily*

"We received word early in the spring that we had received the grant," Threadgill Principal Michael South said.

The grant included two double-rocking chairs, a barrel-shaped bookshelf and a collection of books. The rockers are large enough for one adult or two children.

In October, the school began inviting retired people such as Long, University of North Alabama students and football players, parents and others from the community to read to students while sitting in the rocking chairs, South said.

Rockin' Readers was created by Linda Minor, an elementary school counselor from North Carolina, who wondered what she could do to create a peaceful environment for her students, according to the Cracker Barrel web site.

She believed education was the key to understanding differences between people and cultures, yet she couldn't figure out the best way to connect with her young students. Minor looked back at her childhood and remembered sitting in a rocking chair with her grandmother, reading books and telling stories. The idea was presented to Cracker Barrel, which created the Rockin' Readers program.

The two rockers and the barrel-shaped bookshelf are in Threadgill's main hallway. Long frequently comes to the school to read to students, including Jaliyah Jackson and Sladen Hester, who happens to be Long's grandson.

Jaliyah said she likes to read and listen to others read. "You get to learn something you never learned before," the first-grader said.

"When these kids come out of kindergarten they can read," Long said.

Sladen's name was on a list of "All Star Readers" in his class. He said it was his first time participating in the Rockin' Readers program. South said the program is good for the children and the volunteers.

Sherri Baker, Sheffield Schools' grant coordinator, said the school has to document the number of volunteers and the hours they read. In 2008, volunteers logged 16,400 hours at 122 different schools. She said this year 225 schools in 29 states participated in the Rockin' Readers program.

South said students usually participate in the program later in the school day. Long said he has plenty of time to volunteer at the school since his retirement and he knows the teachers can use the help.

"As long as they enjoy it, I enjoy reading to them," Long said.