

'Grandma' sparks reading interest

November 4, 2008
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Grandma Brown, as Louise Brown is known to the students and staff at Miami Elementary School, has been a volunteer reading to kids in Lafayette School Corp. for 20 years.

After a brief hiatus since 2006, when Linnwood Elementary where she had been a longtime volunteer was closed, 90-year-old Brown is back this year reading books to Miami students each Monday afternoon.



Louise 'Grandma Brown' Brown reads the book 'The Wide-Mouthed Frog' to first-grade student Kristana Perz on Monday at Miami Elementary School. It is the fourth time Brown has come to Miami to read to youngsters.

former Linn-wood kindergarten teacher and current Miami teacher suggested Brown for that school's new program, Weist said Brown's reaction was excitement to be back in the schools.

Miami tries to focus on students learning English or those who could benefit from more vocabulary. About 30 students in the school take part throughout the week during their library time. The school is looking for more community volunteers to increase that number.

"It makes my day," Brown said between reading partners. "These kids put life into me."

Brown is part of a program the school started this year after receiving a donation of two rocking chairs and a barrel of books from the Cracker Barrel Rockin' Reader program. Throughout the week, volunteers from the school staff and the **community** come in to share a book and rocking chair with students outside the school library.

Sheryl Weist, the Reading First coach at Miami, said Brown used to read at several schools through various programs. When a

"They seem to really enjoy listening to her," Weist said. "I think it's great for them. Anytime they can be (immersed) in the English language, it's giving them more vocabulary."

As each kid sits down to read, Brown asks them, "Can I be your grandma?"

Initially, first-grader Brooke Barricks, like several peers, hesitated.

But after helping Brown read through one of grandma's favorite books, "The Wide Mouthed Frog," from the title page through the final "SPLASH!" of the pop-up book, Brooke was laughing and amenable to another grandma.

"She was cool," said Brooke, who had been looking forward to her first Grandma Brown reading Monday.

Brown finishes each book with a hug for the child.

"Do you know why I want to be your grandma?" she asked Brooke. "Because I love you."