

Wester first Lubbock school in Rockin' Reader program

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Kelly Trlica, LISD chief academic officer, reads *The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler to first-graders Gilbert Marin and Sadie Alumbaugh and their classmates at Wester Elementary, to kick off Rockin' Reader, a program to encourage volunteers to read to children.

Merissa Ferguson/Lubbock Avalanche-Journal

Wester Elementary School on Friday became the first Lubbock school to participate in Rockin' Reader, a national literacy program that encourages volunteers to visit elementary schools and read with children.

Wester Elementary Principal Julee Becker said a first-grade class taught by Christen Lozano won the school drawing to become the first Rockin' Reader class in Lubbock. Kelly Trlica, the chief academic officer of the Lubbock Independent School District, was invited to read to the first-graders.

Trlica may have spent most of her education career on the high school level, but you would have never known it after watching her read to Lozano's class. She kept the first-graders in the palm of her hand and had a lively dialogue with them about the book she chose, "The Skin You Live In" by Michael Tyler, with illustrations by David Lee Csicko.

Rockin' Reader is a program started by the Cracker Barrel restaurant corporation in 2008. With Wester added to its list of partner schools, Rockin' Reader is now operating in 225 elementary schools in 29 states.

Becker said Wester PTA president Katie Majors heard about the program and sent her an e-mail about it. Becker looked up the Web site, applied for a grant for the program and received it. "I'm always working for ways to encourage children to read and to encourage adults to read with their kids. And I'm always looking for

ways to involve the communities in our schools. Rockin' Reader marries all of those things together," Becker said.

Cracker Barrel donated two double-rocking chairs and what it calls a barrel full of books, which is a two-shelf bookcase shaped like a barrel. Terry Edwards, Cracker Barrel general manager in Lubbock, said about 30 books were in the barrel and were chosen on the corporate level for their wide appeal and durability.

Edwards and Scott Whitley, Lubbock retail manager, said they were really pleased a Lubbock school had become one of the Rockin' Reader partners.

"We're looking forward to seeing what kind of impact this will have in the school and the community," Whitley said.

It didn't take long for Becker to find some other volunteers to read to the children, and she is looking for others. Several other readers were on duty Friday afternoon, and a group from Bacon Heights Baptist Church was scheduled to read to another first-grade class, she said.

Edwards said more than 16,000 hours of volunteers reading to kids were logged in the program's first year. The goal this year is for 25,000 hours, he said.

Becker said the suggested goal from the corporation for Wester is to have at least 150 volunteer reading hours this year. "We're going to break that, I'm sure," she said.

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