

Fairview's Rockin' Reader program to expand thanks to Cracker Barrel

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By Stephanie Salmons

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Fairview School counselor Linda Minor sits in a double rocker purchased from Cracker Barrel and used as part of the school's Rockin' Reader program. – *Herald* photo by Stephanie Salmons

What is Fairview School Counselor Linda Minor doing to change the world?

She's promoting world peace and caring through literacy with her Rockin' Reader program, which has been in place at Fairview for almost five years.

Now, however, the Rockin' Reader program is expanding beyond the walls of Fairview, taking the idea of caring and literacy into nearly 130 schools in seven states with the help of Cracker Barrel.

The premise of the program is that volunteers from the community come to the school and read with students for 15 minutes in a double rocking chair "to offer unconditional caring, no expectations," Minor said.

Rockin' Reader was designed to promote decision making, thinking skills and understanding, Minor said.

"When this generation of students become adults, they will be more willing to work for world peace because their minds are going to be able to understand and they will have experienced that compassion," she said. "This is one means to world peace."

The program offers students in kindergarten through fourth grade the chance for some one-on-one time with an adult, and it has really been a hit with the students, Minor said.

“As a school counselor – I’ve been here almost 34 years – (I’ve seen) that a lot of students don’t have that one-on-one time,” she said.

Students are often eager to be chosen to read with volunteers, Minor added.

When the program was first getting off the ground, Minor said the only double rocking chairs she could find were ones purchased at Cracker Barrel, Minor said.

The idea for Rockin’ Reader came after a question was issued at a leadership seminar, Minor said.

“The question was asked ‘what are you doing to make a difference in the world?’” Minor said. “It reminded me of a promise I had made to myself in high school that someday I’d like to help make a difference in the world. Along the journey of life, life keeps ‘lifing’ and you go down different avenues and that (question) was a real loud reminder that I needed to get back on track.”

With the support of local officials, Minor set out to change the world.

“I tried to look within myself to see what I knew about,” she said. “I knew about being a mom and a grandma, and I knew that reading was important. I remembered rocking chairs from my grandmother, and so I just tried to combine those ideas of caring and literacy.”

Since its inception, volunteers, which include everyone from college students, retirees, parents and grandparents, have read some 4,153 books to 2,567 students.

According to Minor, this equates to more than 18 extra five-day weeks of reading time.

As the first year of the program was drawing to a close, Minor said she wrote to Cracker Barrel’s corporate headquarters to see if the company would be interested in donating rocking chairs to the program.

No response came, Minor said, but she was undeterred.

She continued writing Cracker Barrel.

“About two years ago, Cracker Barrel hired a new person, and my letter ended up on her desk,” Minor said.

Cracker Barrel has now “adopted” the program, which means the restaurant chain will provide two double-rockers, a barrel bookshelf and a bundle of books (with some books

discussing the idea of peace) to 130 schools across North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Michigan and Indiana.

“It was just a modern-day miracle,” Minor said. “It’s just wonderful. They’re able to take the idea and concept of peace far more than I could have ever done.”

According to Minor, this is only Cracker Barrel’s first phase. If the program is successful, more schools will be given the chance to participate each year while the schools already a part of the program will receive additional bundles of books, she said.

“Who ever thought Fairview School would be on the map?” Minor said.

The question posed at the seminar was really more of a challenge, Minor said..

“It was a real question, and it needed a real answer,” she said. “For me, it was the only thing I knew I could do with my skills and with my knowledge of children.”

According to an announcement from Cracker Barrel, the company is proud to expand the program.

“We hope to build upon Linda’s vision of fostering caring and literacy within the community while working to knock down barriers between cultures by introducing children to new people and new ideas,” the announcement reads. “And who knows, with a little help from all of us, maybe Linda really will change the world someday. Even though we think she already has.”

Fairview principal Dennis Proffitt said that everyone at the school is excited about what Minor has accomplished.

“We’re pleased that she had a dream and could fulfill it,” Proffitt said, adding that the support of the community has really helped make the program a success.

“I’m pleased for Linda and also pleased for the school,” he said. “She came up with a project that will benefit thousands of children.”

Fairview’s Rockin’ Reader program is looking for volunteers to come read with students, Minor said. For more information on volunteering, contact Minor at Fairview at 586-2819.