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Uptown Rotary, Magers & Quinn bring The Great Jefferson School Read to 223 fifth through eighth graders

By Michael Wilson

"Teens no longer care to read a good book," said newspaper headlines in August, reporting on the latest data from the Monitoring the Future survey, which has been going on since 1975. The self-reported reading habits of eighth-, 10th- and 12-graders showed, for example, that one in three high school seniors did not read a single book for pleasure in 2016.

That's definitely not the case at Jefferson School, however, where the 223 fifth- through eighth-graders have already launched into the four-month Great Jefferson School Read, thanks to leadership and funding from the members of Uptown Rotary and the hard work and support of staff at Magers & Quinn and Jefferson.

Ten copies each of twenty titles chosen by Jefferson teachers are being rotated among the fifth-through eighth-grade classrooms, with students writing a brief assessment of every book they read. Their ratings will be combined and a list of "Top Picks" will be announced at a concluding assembly in early February.

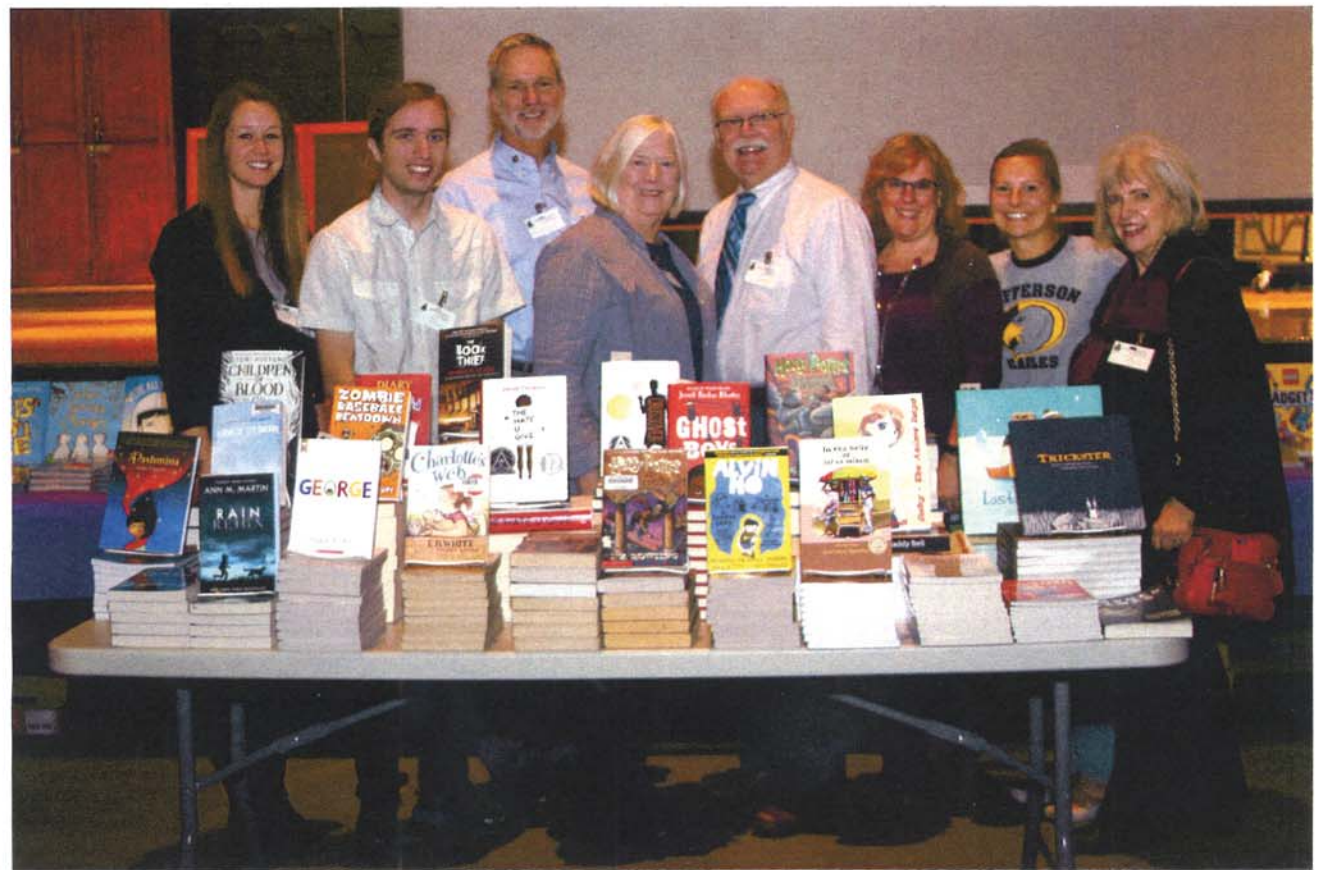
The Great Jefferson School Read takes its inspiration from public television's Great American Read, an eight-part series that explores and celebrates the power of reading, told through the prism of America's 100 best-loved novels (as chosen in a national survey). On the series' final show the results will be announced of a nationwide vote to choose America's best-loved book. (Go to pbs.org/the-great-american-read/about/show/ for more information.)

Reading list tailored to Jefferson students.

Uptown Rotary, Magers & Quinn, and school staff, however, decided to create a reading list that would particularly engage their Jefferson students. Only one of their titles -- *Ghost*, by Jason Reynolds -- also appears on the Great American Read "Young Adult" list. Many of the other 19 books, expertly chosen by coordinating teachers Danielle Knutson (grades 5 and 6) and Carolyn Shapley (grades 7 and 8), are written by authors of color. All address subject matter and issues that will resonate with Jefferson students' world and life experiences.

And what a list it is! Go to the end of this article to see many of the titles, then go to Magers & Quinn or Birchbark Books to buy several for the young people in your life.

Students learned about the Great Jefferson Read program at an assembly on October 11. Their strong preference for digital media notwithstanding, the students clearly had their curiosity piqued when Knutson and Shapley described the twenty books chosen for



The Great Jefferson School Read kicked off at an October 11 assembly for Jefferson's 223 fifth through eighth graders. Pictured from left: Christine Utz and Charlie Gilmore, Magers & Quinn's Sales and Outreach team; Uptown Rotarians Ed Hasselman, Glenna Case (who's also a Cedar-Isles-Dean resident), and Tom Sopoci; Susan Everson, Jefferson administrative Teacher on Special Assignment; Elizabeth Hale, Jefferson Family/Community Liaison; and Uptown Rotarian (and Kenwood resident) Gaile Sovell Kenyon. (Photo: Dorothy Childers. Caption: Michael Wilson.)

the program and gave a slide presentation showing pictures of the authors.

Uptown Rotary members Tom Sopoci, Glenna Case, Gaile Sovell Kenyon, and Ed Hasselman then gave each of the 115 fifth- and six-graders a dictionary of their own to keep (Webster's Dictionary for Students, Fifth Edition) and each of the 108 seventh- and eighth-graders their own copy of Roget's Thesaurus of Words for Students.

(Yes, paperbound dictionaries and thesauri may seem like quaint anachronisms in this digital age, but undoubtedly at least a few Jefferson students will come to treasure these books and carry them to college and beyond. Remember how we used to love losing ourselves in the pages of World Book?)

Uptown Rotary's 12-year Jefferson relationship.

This year's Great Jefferson Read is the latest undertaking in the remarkable relationship between the people of Uptown Rotary and the students and staff at Jefferson, stretching back twelve years and an outgrowth of Rotary International's mission of community service.

Under the leadership of club member Jon Manchester, Uptown Rotary continues to bring the Sheridan Story to Jefferson, a program begun in Minneapolis (and now statewide) which discreetly provides food on Friday afternoons for students, nominated by staff, whose food security over the weekend may be in doubt. Uptown Rotary's Warm Hats Heads and Hearts program provides hats, mittens and scarves both at Jefferson and the Joyce Food Shelf. Members are involved in mentoring at Jefferson, and last year Uptown Rotary took all Jefferson 3rd and 8th graders to Magers & Quinn to select a book -- any book -- of their own to keep. (It was a huge success.)

Tom Sopoci is the dedicated Uptown Rotary member whose hard work has brought in a \$5000 competitively-awarded grant from International Rotary again this year to underwrite the Great Jefferson Read.

Sopoci praises Magers & Quinn for their deep community engagement. "Christine Utz, of Magers & Quinn's sales and outreach team, was involved in the planning and organizing of the event and ordering the books," Sopoci says. "She helped secure a 20 percent

discount on all books and free delivery from publishers. And Mary Magers has encouraged community and school reading programs in other schools in the Twin Cities."

Giving the opportunity to love books.

"I'm involved with the students at Jefferson School because they are our future," Sopoci says. "How we treat them and provide for their growing up will help determine what kind of future we can expect. Showing interest in their education, nutrition and social status in a positive way now can help make a difference in how they mature into responsible citizens. There are no promises, but why stand by and just do nothing when you know showing these young people you are interested in them will spark something in their attitude toward learning and responsibility for their own futures?"

Uptown Rotarian and Cedar-Isles-Dean resident Glenna Case states that literacy and lifelong learning are key missions of Rotary International and Uptown Rotary. "The ability to read and think critically are life skills essential for success. In my own life a passion for reading instilled early by my parents has given me much success personally and professionally," Case says.

"Many children at Jefferson School are immigrants with parents who are not literate in English," Case continues. "Others have parents working two or three jobs just to sustain the family at a bare-bones level. Some parents don't have the money to fill the house with books or the time to read to their children. Uptown Rotary's commitment to literacy at Jefferson School gives students their own books. It introduces them to dictionaries and thesauruses. The children have also been introduced to bookstores and have

selected books for their very own. This year they get to read multiple books and will also meet authors."

Why are she and her fellow Uptown Rotarians so dedicated to The Great Jefferson Read? "It's very rewarding to give the children at Jefferson the opportunity to love books," Case says.

Here's the book list.

The Great Jefferson Read book list was created by Jefferson teachers and Magers & Quinn staff. There are a lot of terrific books here!

- Freddie Ramos Takes Off (Zapato Power #1), by Jacqueline Jules
- Ghost Boys, by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- Zombie Baseball Beatdown, by Paolo Bacigalupi
- The Hate U Give, by Angie Thomas
- Us, in Progress, by Lulu Delacre
- The Crossover, by Kwame Alexander
- In the Belly of Dar Es Salaam, by Elieshi Lema
- Trickster, by Matt Dembicki
- Children of Blood and Bone, by Tomi Adeyemi
- Home of the Brave, by Katherine Applegate
- Pashmina, by Nidhi Chanani
- Rain Reign, by Ann M. Martin
- Alvin Ho (Book 1), by Lenore Look
- If You Come Softly, by Jacqueline Woodson
- Lost and Found, by Oliver Jeffers
- Ghost, by Jason Reynolds
- George, by Alex Gino
- Diary of a Wimpy Kid, by Jeff Kinney
- Gaby - The Anime Days (Book 1), by Madeline Bell

'Check us out,' Uptown Rotary says.

The Great Jefferson Read program has a particularly strong resonance for Kenwood resident Gaile Sovell Kenyon. As a former teacher at Southwest High School, Sovell Kenyon appreciates the literacy focus at a school where 98 percent of its students participate in the school's free and reduced price lunch program and where upwards of 200 of the 700 students experience homelessness.

Sovell Kenyon has been a member of Rotary since her retirement from MPS in 2006 and enjoys volunteering at Jefferson in the Sheridan Story and the Garden Project that established gardens at the school, and tutoring 3rd graders in reading and math.

Uptown Rotary is a dynamic group of women and men who take an active part in community service both locally and through their Haiti Outreach project, which under the leadership of club member Dale Snyder has worked to establish potable water and latrines in Pignon, Haiti, since 1997.

"Plus, we like to have fun together as Uptown Rotarians and with all the other Rotary chapters in the across the country and around the world," Sovell Kenyon says. "You should check us out."

Go to minneapolisuptownrotary.org for more information, or better yet email club president Ed Hasselman directly at ed.hasselman@gmail.com. Hasselman, Soposi, Case, Sovell Kenyon, and club members Granville Lawrence (Kenwood) and Guy Johnson (Cedar-Isles-Dean) also invite you simply to show up at one of the club's weekly 7:30 am meetings at the Minikahda Club for breakfast and an interesting speaker. ("You get to be a Minikahda Club member once a week without having to pay Minikahda's dues," Lawrence quips.)