



'Where the biggies leave off...'

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## Uptown Rotary hosts 125 Jefferson students at Magers & Quinn for "Choose Your Own Book" Day

By Michael Wilson

How's this for a great idea: put 75 rambunctious 3rd graders and 50 seen-it-all 8th graders on city buses, drop them off in Uptown, and turn them loose in a bookstore to browse and choose a book of their own to take home.

Uh ... right.

But that's exactly what the stalwart members of Uptown Rotary did on February 7 and 8, continuing the service organization's longstanding partnership with the students and staff at Jefferson School and forging new ties with Magers & Quinn Booksellers.

Thanks to a \$4000 grant from Rotary International, the 125 Jefferson students were able to ride #6 MTC buses, one homeroom of 25 students at a time, accompanied by their teachers, other staff, and volunteers, from 26th and Hennepin to 31st and Hennepin and back again. Once inside Magers & Quinn, they all filed to the high-ceilinged back of the store where a smiling and unflappable Andrea Manolov, outreach and sales assistant, welcomed everybody, explained the layout of the Youth department, and then turned the students loose.

"Wow! It looks so little on the outside but it's so BIG on the inside," exclaimed one 3rd grader to no one in particular as he headed towards a display of shiny book jackets to begin his search.

Teachers, volunteers, and store staff answered questions and gave suggestions and gentle guidance, but what impressed observers was the way students helped each other zero in on a choice of a book. "These students clearly have a love for books," Manolov said admiringly.

**"The kids always rise to the occasion."**

ECCO resident and Uptown Rotarian Tom Sopoci remarked on seeing a large 8th grader who, according to his teacher, spoke no English and decided to just plop down in one corner of the room to wait for the visit to be over. A bilingual classmate walked over and encouraged his friend to come and check out the Spanish-language books. Soon the student was busily finding a book of his own to take home.

Were the teachers at all concerned about this outing? "No, not at all," said teacher Tammy Torok, who's

taught 3rd grade at Jefferson for eight years. "The kids always rise to the occasion.

Last year Uptown Rotary began a service project of working with Magers & Quinn to give each 3rd grader at Jefferson a dictionary. Co-owner Mary Magers suggested then that the 3rd graders might like to visit the store. The club members and the Jefferson staff liked the idea, according to CIDNA resident and current Uptown Rotary president Guy Johnson, and decided to expand the project this year to Jefferson's 8th grade as well.

Earlier this month Uptown Rotary members presented dictionaries again to the 3rd graders and also gave each 8th grader a thesaurus. Wait ... what? A thesaurus? In book form? "The students loved it," Johnson says. Teachers created a big, blank "Word Wall" and put a couple of "starter words" at the top. The 8th graders then enthusiastically used their thesauri to write as many synonyms as they could find under the starter words.

During the planning process club members said, "Why just visit the bookstore. Let's make it possible for The members of Uptown Rotary and staff at Magers & Quinn Booksellers hosted 125 third and eighth graders from Jefferson School on February 7 and 8. Thanks to a grant from Rotary International all students were able to select a book -- any book -- to take home. Uptown Rotary has had a longstanding service relationship with the students and staff at Jefferson. every student to explore the shelves and choose a book of their own to take home." The \$4000 grant underwrote the costs, with Magers & Quinn providing a discount.

"We had no misgivings at all," says Magers. "We love having kids in the store, especially kids who may never have been in a bookstore before." CIDNA resident and Uptown Rotarian Glenna Case adds that the visits help create more relationships in the community between families, students, schools, and books.

**Hill and Lake neighborhoods support Jefferson and Kenwood.**

Uptown Rotary began their relationship with Jefferson in the early 2000s, according to Case, through what was then called the Sheridan Project. School staff

prepared a list of students who would likely spend part or all of the weekend without food, and on Friday afternoons service group members placed bags of food anonymously inside the students' lockers. Uptown Rotary chose Jefferson.

This year Uptown Rotary is providing weekend food supplies to 120 students at Jefferson. "We're a small club," Johnson says, "so we partner with the folks at Mount Olive Lutheran Church to make the actual deliveries to kids' lockers."

Longtime Kenwood resident and Uptown Rotarian Granville Lawrence says that the club was instrumental in transforming the ugly interior courtyard at Jefferson into a landscaped garden and seating area. Club members did a vegetable garden at Jefferson for a year. For many years Uptown Rotary has also purchased hats and mittens for Jefferson's "Warm heads, warm hands, warm hearts" program.

For the first ten years of Hill & Lake Press Lawrence and his wife Rosemary and their kids Adam, Joy, and Scott were responsible for delivering HLP to all the homes in Kenwood. Lawrence remembers how enthusiastically the neighborhoods supported both Kenwood and Jefferson back in those days. Every HLP issue during the school year had a "Jefferson" and "Kenwood" column reporting on school events and people. "I'm glad to be part of our community's ongoing support of Jefferson," Lawrence says.

The \$4000 Rotary International grant was a one-time thing, Johnson says. The club would love to have a few funding partners to keep the Magers & Quinn book project going next year and beyond.

Rotary International is a world-wide service organization with 1.2 million members in over 35,000 clubs. Closer to home, Uptown Rotary meets Thursday mornings and welcomes guests and new members. For more information about the Magers & Quinn project or about attending an Uptown Rotary meeting, contact Tom Sopoci (thsopoci@gmail.com) or Guy Johnson (guy@nutritionalsolutions.net).



Photos by Guy Johnson. Caption by Michael Wilson

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