

Getting kids excited about reading

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

“It’s not about teaching kids to read. It’s about getting them excited about books and reading.” That’s how Diane Turnbull, the Central Oregon area manager for SMART, describes the program.

SMART, or Start Making A Reader Today, began in 1992 and has had a site in Sisters since close to the beginning. The concept is simple: pairing one adult volunteer with one child to build a love for reading at an early age. SMART volunteers read one-on-one with students twice weekly during the school year to model a love of reading and help build reading skills and self-confidence.

In the past the SMART program in Sisters read with kindergarten students twice a week for 30 minutes. Through schedule changes the program is no longer available at the kindergarten level but is still going strong for preschool students. Through a partnership between the Sisters Park & Recreation District Community Preschool and SMART, students in the preschool, ages 3-5, receive one-on-one reading time each

week throughout the school year.

Twice a week the volunteers come to the preschool program and read for 15-20 minutes with each student. The children get to pick the books they read with their volunteers, and once a month each child gets to pick a book to take home and keep.

For the last five years, the local site coordinator for the Sisters SMART Program is Deborah Olsen.

“I just love to see the excitement in the children’s eyes,” she says. “They are so animated and excited about everything. Often as soon as we sit down the kids want to hold the books, turn the pages – it’s so cute to see what they choose to read.”

The intention of SMART is to provide a literacy experience that entices children into books, reading, supports children’s efforts to learn to read and celebrates their successes. It is designed as a complement to reading curriculum and in-class instruction. Each session students have with a volunteer reader is intended to build confidence and build lifelong readers who enjoy reading.

“Reading is a great skill to



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

SMART volunteers engage with children to help them build reading skills.

have, but the SMART reader’s role is about more than just reading,” says Turnbull. “It’s about mentorship and giving the kids another positive adult role model to look up to.”

SMART is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and does its own fundraising. The local sites do not pay for the local program. The Kiwanis Club of Sisters has been a significant supporter of SMART, along with individual donors, and in the past the Community 101 class at Sisters High School has granted funds to support

SMART.

Volunteers are welcome throughout the year for SMART readers. Interested parties can log on to www.GetSmartOregon.org and click on the “Volunteer Now” button. The application is available online and requires a background check.

“The volunteers get as much out of it as the kids, that’s one of the coolest things about SMART,” says Turnbull, “This program is a beautiful gift to the kids as well as the readers.”

Sisters salutes...

• Bill Anttila wrote:

On behalf of my daughter and wife, I would like to thank the Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire Department paramedic crew who responded to a Tuesday afternoon traffic accident on Highway 242.

The paramedics were very thoughtful, concerned, and professional in their treatment of injuries sustained by our daughter, Chelsea.

Also, thanks to Jim Cornelius for stopping at the scene and helping direct traffic.

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