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Summer reading program provides skill-building experience for children

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

In an era where digital screens are everywhere, one would think that reading is a pastime only enjoyed by those who grew up with bookmobiles, book clubs, and four television channels.

But in Multnomah County, reading is alive and well, especially during the long school break.

The summer reading program, sponsored by the Multnomah County libraries, entices children to read while encouraging them to become lifelong library users.

Research shows that the reading skills a student gains during the school year are lost if he or she does not read during the summer.

The program reaches children from birth through age 18. Parents and children track reading progress using a game that challenges any level reader. The program works like this:

Children can visit any public library to sign up and will then receive a game board.

Participant then set goals and choose books. Milestones are reached with the

help of their parents, library staff, or volunteers.

The program relies on the work of more than 700 volunteers each year – a majority of whom are teenagers. At the Hillsdale branch alone, there are approximately 35 teen volunteers.

Participation is free. To play, children spend time reading, listening to books, or completing suggested learning activities, then mark spaces on their game boards.

Nearly 110,000 children and teens registered for the Summer Reading program in 2013. This makes it one of the largest programs in the nation.

Seventy-three percent of all youth in Multnomah County participated in the program in 2013.

According to Jimmy Kim of Harvard University, "Reading over the summer is essential to maintaining literacy gains made during the school year. Independent, self-directed reading is vital to the development of a child's literacy skills."

Self-directed reading is defined as reading done outside of school assignments solely because the child wants to.

"Summer reading provides just that kind of skill-building experience," said Barbara Head, youth librarian at the



Recent Wilson High School graduate, Kenny Noble, 18, has been volunteering for eight years at the summer reading program. "I help kids sign up, award their prizes, and help them choose books," Noble explained. An honors student, Noble will be attending Oregon State University in the fall to study engineering. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Hillsdale branch library.

"Children and teens who read during the summer," Head stated, "maintain their reading skills and are more likely

to be successful when they return to school."

The summer reading program has
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Multnomah Boulevard bike, pedestrian improvements continue through October



Jim Peterson has been building relationships with the contractors at the Multnomah Boulevard construction project. He lives and works in the heart of the construction zone. "The crews have been fantastic," Peterson said. "It's the city you need to watch out for!" (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

By Erik Vidstrand
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For residents, business owners, and commuters who traverse Southwest Multnomah Boulevard, construction just seems to be a way of life.

Ever since the sewer work was completed years ago, along the same line where the Oregon Electric railroad once ran, the Multnomah community has continued to see its share of delays and disruption.

The bike and pedestrian project is in its final stages. What will be a wider, safer, and more inclusive boulevard, at the moment is much narrower with no shoulder for eastbound vehicles.

Currently, a multi-use path for cyclists and pedestrians is being constructed along the south side between 25th and 31st avenues. A long linear green-street planter will provide a buffer between the path and roadway.

What looks like a second sidewalk, along the opposite side of the street, is in fact an enhanced bicycle track. The standard sidewalk with a planting strip and green-street planters are already in place.

At the July 8 meeting of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association, vice-chair Beth Omansky proclaimed, "We no longer live in a food desert! We have a safe, easy route to the new Safeway."

Jim Peterson, owner of Custom Woodworking (Southwest 25th and Multnomah Boulevard) works and lives in the heart of the road construction. He continues to be one of the determined community activists keeping his finger on the pulse of the various projects in the area.

Peterson was recently elected land use chair for the neighborhood. As a trained engineer, Peterson follows the paperwork trail, attends city meetings, and speaks up about issues or work that just doesn't seem right.

"The bike-pedestrian pathway on the south side of the project seems to be going well," Peterson said recently while watching a worker put up orange safety net. "There will be a crossing light at 25th. The bicycles are getting some kind of activation switch at 31st and maybe 25th. Road paving is supposed to happen the first week of August, according to the project coordinator."

The *Post* also spoke with Cheryl Kuck, community outreach staff from Portland Bureau of Environmental Services.

Will trees be planted to replace the older firs that were removed? "Yes, they will be replaced with fir trees and will be planted at the end of the project," Kuck replied.

When asked about the bioswales not draining properly, Kuck said, "The plants need a chance to get established and do their job. A good, full growing season generally resolves any initial slow drainage issues."

Kuck said the project is on track for completion in October, 2014. "Since July, work has been completed on the north side of the street; fencing has been erected between the Century Link knoll and sidewalk; and plants are doing well in the sidewalk medians and bioswales will be planted in the fall."

For more information about the Multnomah Boulevard improvements, please contact Cheryl Kuck at 503-823-7898 or email Cheryl.Kuck@portlandoregon.gov.

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Portland, OR 97206