

# Cottage Grove Rotary donates \$4,000 in new books to local rural schools

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Rural schools in London and Dorena each received an infusion of literary material this past week as a total of \$4,000 in books were obtained with the help of the Rotary Club of Cottage Grove Oregon.

"We are so grateful for this gift to get new books into the hands of our students," said London School Principal Laurie Melendy. "Literacy is a passion and focus area in education and the opportunity to get this many new books all at once does not happen often."

The Rotary Club of Cottage Grove Oregon is a group is made up of a spec-

trum of professional leaders in the community who focus on economic and community development.

Rotary International lists seven areas of focus: peace and conflict prevention/resolution; disease prevention and treatment; providing water and sanitation; maternal and child health; growing local economies; protecting the environment; and providing basic education and literacy.

Dana Merryday, a member of the local Rotary Club, helped get the books to the schools by getting the local club's initial \$2,000 investment matched through a District Grant.

"For this grant, we decided to focus on literacy right



COURTESY PHOTO

Members of the Rotary Club of Cottage Grove were on hand yesterday (March 17) to help facilitate part of the \$2,000 of new book donations to the London school. Last week, \$2,000 in new books were presented to Dorena as well.

here in our immediate area," said Merryday, adding that rural areas often face economic hardship. "The most economically depressed are challenged and the ones least likely to have access to internet and or books, particularly with the public library being closed."

Both schools serve grades K-8 and it's hoped the addition of robust libraries will have a positive impact on the children's lives.

"Just to have a new influx of quality literature is very exciting and dynamic," said Elizabeth Chandra LaHu-

sen, past club president of the local Rotary Club. "It's not just a matter of how many books — it's also a matter of the quality and that they're age-appropriate and that they're used in a way that the children can relate to."

After small socially-distanced presentations attended by school staff, administration and Rotarians, the books were put on display for children to get a chance to tour.

Getting such literary exposure to rural students is a deep need. The closing

of historic Latham School two years ago demonstrated the challenges many rural schools face in keeping afloat and the importance of providing opportunities for students.

"I think there are some things that the small schools can address that the larger schools can't in terms of the students' needs, the sense of community within the school and the connectedness and continuity within the school," said LaHusen.

Giving students an alternative to a screen-dominated world was important, too, she said.

"Just to open up to the world of imagination and literature, it's so exciting because we are in this elec-

tronic era and that changes things a lot. So, to use the brain in that way, and to use your faculties of imagination in that way, it really does expand your horizons in a different way. And there's a lot of value in that," said LaHusen, hoping the books will inspire lifelong interests in reading. "To open up worlds and cultivate meaning, I think is so valuable."

Delivering books to these schools has excited educators as well.

"We were able to give our library a much-needed listening center to support all readers, provide classroom sets for book reports and class read alongs, and create an exciting inventory for our upper grades with updated and current books," said Dorena School Principal Devin Pixton. "We are so incredibly grateful and the adults here are just as overjoyed as our students."

Melendy, too, expressed her gratitude for the difference the donation will make at London School.

"We know the importance of reading and how a good book can capture the imagination, build curiosity and knowledge for our students," said Melendy. "Thank you, Rotary, for all that you give to our community and schools. Your donation will make a long-lasting difference for our students."

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