

Promoting literacy awareness



Rorie Measure
The Reading Solution

We live in a vibrant and generous community with many groups promoting literacy. Here are five local programs that focus on creating successful school outcomes for our children.

New shoes and books

With back-to-school excitement in the air, the Aprendamos Intervention Team provides new school shoes for children who need them.

"Parents are struggling so we help out with new shoes," Caroline Zamora, AIT communication specialist, said. "Reading is critical to learning so we are putting books in homes as well."

Currently, 165 children in Hatch and Arrey are receiving a pair of shoes and a book. More children are on a waiting list. Sponsors include Steinmann Prosthetics, Hatch Mercantile, Tu Media, Aprendamos, Radio of Las Cruces and the Children's Reading Foundation.

Health and reading

Ben Archer Health Centers (BAHC) have adopted the Reach Out And Read program for children under the age of five.

"During well-child visits, the medical staff discusses the importance of reading with children and provides a new book," Kara Bower said. "BAHC community health care workers visit parents at home to teach the importance of early literacy and provide a free book and educational toy."

Positive role models

If you have read this far you may be thinking about getting involved, too. Katherine Souza of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern New Mexico is ready to show you how one hour a week at a local school can enrich your life and the life of a child.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern New Mexico promotes literacy through the mentoring process. In the school-based mentoring program, the big and little meet one hour per week during the school year at the little's school. They eat lunch, work on homework and play.

"The big is making a difference and building a legacy of 'pass it on' caring that will influence generations to come," Souza said. "The little gains both immediate and long term benefits from having

See **Reading** on page C25

Engineer pushes the limit

Death Race not for the weak of heart

By **Rachel Christiansen**
Las Cruces Bulletin

Justin Attebury is a normal guy – a 22-year-old with an engineering degree from New Mexico State University and employee of local company Stubbs Engineering – but he has somewhat of an extreme passion.

Convincing his dad to let him participate in the Bataan Memorial Death March at 8 years old, Attebury got his first taste of what would later develop into a lifelong love and affliction for marathons.

Ultra marathons, to be exact – courses that run more than 50 miles – are now the only races Attebury enters.

Possibly the king of these extreme races is what is known simply as the Death Race, which has made it to several sports magazines' top 100 lists of toughest races in the world.

Saying it had been on his radar as something to work toward for the past few years, Attebury made his way to the registration table in Pittsfield, Vt., before the sun came up on June 21.

The participants are told little information about what to expect from the race – the directors design it that way to make it harder to train for – other than what bits and pieces are gleaned from past Death Race survivors.

"This race is about 99 percent mental and 1 percent physical," Attebury said. "You realize after awhile that you can start to ignore the pain, it's the mind games that will get you."

To call it a "race," however, is a little far-fetched, Attebury said, due to the extreme and sometimes bizarre nature of the challenges throughout the race.



Las Cruces resident Justin Attebury was one of several hundred 2013 Death Race contestants in Pittsfield, Vt. The race lasted more than 60 straight hours, and contestants received poker chips for completing any series of grueling and sometimes bizarre challenges.



Photos by Ollin Venegas

Chopping approximately 30 logs of wood and carrying individual piles a total distance of several miles was one of the obstacles of the Death Race, an ultra marathon in Pittsfield, Vt., where contestants never really know what to expect.

"Ninety percent of what comes out of the race directors' mouths is a lie," Attebury said. "The whole reason they put this race together was to break people, to take you to your ultimate limit and make you fail."

"Once you hit that wall, you figure out where your boundaries are so you can push past them the next time."

This year, the Death Race lasted more than 60 hours, with little to no sleep and minimal food.

Half the participants, Attebury said, were out before the first challenge was over, which involved moving boulders and rocking a trail "Egyptian style" up the side of a mountain.

After about 16 hours of that, the race directors said the "actual race" was about to begin.

"I think I heard the race directors say, 'Now the race is really going to start,' about 15 times," Attebury said.

Once the trail was built, the contestants hiked several miles, on to the next feat of chopping wood – about 30 freshly chopped trees each – and carry their piles to and from the drop-off point about 600 yards away from the chopping site.

Then, after a climb down a muddy ravine lined with barbed wire, racers got their first taste of the "gambling" theme of the race.

"When you finally got down there, there were kid volunteers handing out playing cards, so you took your card, climbed back up the ravine and had to play the race director," Attebury said. "It was a simple game of high-low, and if you beat him, you didn't have to go back down for another card."

If you didn't beat the race director – fortunately for Attebury, he did, and more treks down the treacherous path did not have to be made.

Then the hiking began. Across a stretch of land known as Bloodroot Trail, the contestants marched at night, in the rain, a 25-mile stretch of mountainous Vermont terrain.

"Sleepwalking was rampant, and I hallucinated all kinds of things," Attebury said.

Ollin Venegas, who crewed for Attebury throughout the race, was able at one point to bring him pizza, some of the best pizza he had ever tasted, Attebury said.

It may sound like torture to some, but for people like Attebury and other extreme-challenge seekers, it's a rush.

"You meet some of the most incredible people that you could ever imagine," Attebury said. "It's a mutual suck – everyone is miserable so, in turn, everyone is happy."

After more physical challenges such as hiking, swimming, rock-paving and exercises, the racers were told the race was finally over around midnight on Sunday, June 23.

The next morning at 6 a.m., when awards were supposed to be given to the official finishers, the next round of gambling came into play.

The racers, given poker chips for completing obstacles throughout the race, had to lay all of their chips on the line in a game of chance to get their

finisher's trophy.

"There were people trying to bet other things," Attebury said. "Like one guy tried to put down his car keys, because he wanted that

See **Death Race** on page C25

“ You figure out where your boundaries are so you can push past them the next time. ”

JUSTIN ATTEBURY
Death Race contestant

Death Race

Continued from page C24

skull so bad.”

Because he missed one of the time constraints during the race, Attebury was not considered an official finisher, but he completed the race, and was allowed to gamble to win his bib back, a token of pride for Death Race survivors.

“I went there with the attitude that I was going to give it everything I’ve got,” he said.

“Looking back, I’m really happy with what I did, and I’m proud of myself because I didn’t quit.”

Upon returning to the City of the Crosses, Attebury vowed to never do the Death Race again. Alas, he has already registered for 2014.

Reading

Continued from page C24

an adult who listens and provides guidance.”

Children who participate in this program are 52 percent less likely to skip school than youth who have not participated in mentoring.”

Struggling readers

The NM Lions Crane Reading Foundation offers reading instruction at Camino Real Middle School and the Boys & Girls Club of Las Cruces.

“Our program is effective for students at all reading levels, including high school and adults,” Eldon Steelman said. “It will increase the reading speed of good readers and bring struggling readers up to grade level. Given the importance of good vision in reading, we screen all students to determine if they need glasses. In some cases, we also screen for eye tracking problems. If the parents cannot afford glasses and have no insurance, the Las Cruces Host Lions Club funds eye exams and glasses through Dr. Lucero’s Accutech Eye Care Center.”

For more information, call Steelman at 373-2912. To enroll a student, contact Cathy Waters at 640-5020.

Family Literacy Expo

A day of fun activities, informative workshops and free books is being planned by the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce. Parents are invited to bring the whole family to Lynn Middle School on Saturday, Sept. 21. Festivities begin at 11 a.m. with lunch, followed by literacy workshops, activities and prizes until 3 p.m.

Much thanks to those of you who have shared information. Submit your ideas and share your experiences in local reader friendly environments. Read with a child every day.

The Children’s Reading Foundation of Doña Ana County (CRF-DA) is a community-driven project that focuses on improving literacy throughout Doña Ana County. Rorie Measure serves on the Board of Directors of CRF-DA as Director of Public Awareness. Contact Measure at roriecrf@gmail.com.

Reading program enhances skills

Boys & Girls Club sees summer improvement

By **Rachel Christiansen**
Las Cruces Bulletin

At 8:30 a.m. on a weekday, the halls of the Boys & Girls Club of Las Cruces seem eerily quiet.

That’s because the students enrolled in the summer program spend the first hour of their day enhancing their reading and comprehension skills in the computer lab.

They were the first ones to get to play on 20 new computers given to the club in May, equipped with a reading program designed to work with each individual child and monitor their progress.

Of all the activities the children do during their time with the club – sports, music, games, etc. – computer time may not be a crowd favorite, but because of a reading program called the Fluent Reading Trainer (FLRT), marketed by MindPlay, its effect is invaluable.

“I think it definitely does help to combat the summer slide,” said program coordinator Brian Johnson. “This enhances our reading program because now we can actually track their progress.”

Students using the program at the club range from five to 12 years old, and a beginning assessment is done on each individual to determine at what level they should begin.

FLRT has seen huge success in other local schools such as Mesilla Valley Christian Schools (MVCS).

MVCS began using the FLRT in 2011, and within a matter of months could report success stories such as children who significantly improved their reading levels from 100 to 1,300 words per minute.

“It has real people on there who communicate with the kids and talk them through it to improve their literacy,” Johnson said. “The program focuses not just on reading but on comprehension skills.”

FLRT was the brainchild of Allen Crane, a retiree living in Las Cruces who developed the program as a way to combine the physical problems associated with reading and computerized learning programs to train both the eye and mind.

“Allen and his wife have 40-plus years of experience trying to improve student’s reading,” said Elden Steelman, secretary of the New Mexico Lions Crane Reading Foundation (LCRF).

On behalf of the LCRF, Steelman



Las Cruces Bulletin photo by Rachel Christiansen
Samantha España, a MindPlay supervisor at the Boys & Girls Club of Las Cruces, assists Jose Herrera, 8, with his headphones. Espana was advancing his reading skills with the digital MindPlay Virtual Reading Program, which was started at the club in May.

wrote and applied for the grant to fund the new computers with the program, and said they knew the children were using out-dated computers at the Boys & Girls Club.

“I sought funds from the Stocker Foundation, and they were interested in supporting reading efforts,” Steelman said. “So the first line item was to get the new computers.”

Sure enough, the Stocker Foundation awarded a \$10,000 grant to get the club new computers, equipped with the MindPlay program.

“I’ve been delighted with the progress and the way the classes have been going,” Steelman said. “I’ve seen some of the instructors who are remarkably good at getting the kids to focus.”

Johnson admitted starting the program was met with a little resistance from the students at first, but after putting in place incentive programs for good behavior and achievements, it became part of the daily routine.

“We always try to tie educational

programs into the activities we do here,” Johnson said. “With the reading programs before, the parents didn’t really know about it, but now they can actually see printouts of their child’s progress and also have access to that information.”

“The parents have been really appreciative,” Johnson said.

So where did all this generosity come from?

The LCRF has had several successful past initiatives to integrate the reading program into schools that have the need.

The members have made it their mission to improve literacy in the area, which is why they seek sometimes under-the-radar foundations, such as the Stocker Foundation, for help with this task.

“I would say that we’d be perfectly happy if we went out of business, or if our program was no longer needed,” Steelman said.

As education continues to be a hot topic in the state, that may not come any time soon.

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