

<http://www.columbiatribune.com/news/2011/aug/19/turning-the-page/>

Eagle Scout devotes summer to children's literacy



Mary Floyd/Courtesy

Eagle Scout Drew Floyd reads “Sleeping Beauty” to two girls during a “Lunch in the Park” event at Douglass Park. Floyd was inspired to undertake the children’s literacy project after spending time tutoring students at Gentry Middle School.

By Catherine Martin

Friday, August 19, 2011

When it came time for Drew Floyd, 16, to work on his Eagle Scout project, he wanted to stay away from traditional projects such as building benches for parks or churches.

Many of his friends had gone that route, and although Floyd recognized the importance of those projects for the community, he said he wanted to “break the mold.”

Ultimately, he decided to spend some of his summer afternoons at Douglass Park, where he read to children participating in the “Lunch in the Park” program, which offers kids a free lunch on weekdays during the summer. The idea, Floyd said, was inspired by time he spent tutoring students at Gentry Middle School as part of the “Youth in Action” summer volunteer program.

“I just saw that all the kids love to read, but some of them had trouble reading at grade level,” he said.

At Lunch in the Park, Floyd and a group of his peers read children books such as “Where the Wild Things Are” and the “Magic Tree House” series. At the end of the event, the kids could take home a few books to read on their own.

Floyd started collecting books for the event in the spring with a goal of obtaining 100 books through donations or by purchasing them at garage sales. Ultimately, he ended up with 2,001 books and gave 1,726 books to children at Lunch in the Park, donating the remaining books to the Armory Sports and Recreation Center.

“It felt rewarding,” he said. “It seems like all the hard work I put in finally made a difference.”

Collecting so many books was no easy task, but the hardest part for Drew, his mom, Mary Floyd, said, was asking for help.

“He’s not used to asking for help,” she explained. “But he saw a need and asked friends and neighbors; he really made it the best because he did ask for help.”

His efforts made the project a success, said Cindy Mustard, executive director of the Voluntary Action Center, which runs Lunch in the Park.

“The kids really just thought it was great,” she said. “And he really talked to the kids about showing them how important it is to keep reading and don’t just give it up for the summer.”

Mustard said she was impressed by Floyd, the amount of support he had, and the quality and quantity of the books he was ultimately able to provide. From the get-go, she said she knew he had a great idea.

“I thought it was a really unique Eagle Scout project. ... Any way we can keep kids involved in education through the summer is a plus,” she said. “A lot of kids that come to the park may not be in summer programs.”

Floyd’s initiative even expanded to become a whole “literacy day,” Mustard said, as the Daniel Boone Regional Library’s bookmobile came on the same day to provide kids with even more choices for books. “It was definitely a success; I hope he comes back next summer,” she said.

Although it won’t be part of an Eagle Scout project, Floyd said he does intend to come back to read at Lunch in the Park next summer and enlist friends from sports teams he’s involved in, such as cross country and track, to lend a hand. But the end to this summer’s program was bittersweet.

“I was sad because I knew I couldn’t come back next week,” he said.