

## Learning to love reading, and loving learning

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 22 April 2016 05:10

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Gallup Reads is just one of the educational programs that work well, though it is not included in the general curricula of Gallup McKinley County Schools. The concept was passed through the local Gallup-McKinley Chamber of Commerce after several board members had visited Albuquerque's chamber and heard about the program set up in New Mexico's most populous school district.

When the chamber decided to pursue this system in Gallup, the name was altered for local flavor and board member Linda Murphy picked up the original banner to get the program started and helped to handle the \$10,000 donation from the chamber to purchase books.

Formerly in the banking business, Murphy recruited volunteers from the community to offer their time in reading to Kindergarten-aged students. The readings are mostly one-on-one, and the need for more volunteers is constant.

"We need volunteers more than money," Murphy said.

Working only three days per week – Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday – the volunteers are able to provide and impart their love of reading, which leads very naturally to a love of learning. Teachers throughout every school system agree that a student who reads well and who loves to read, will do much better in school and in life.

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“My students have really benefitted from their experiences with the volunteers (Reading Buddies),” Keegan Mackenzie-Chavez says in a letter of appreciation from Stagecoach Elementary, where she teaches. “My kiddos love their Reading Buddies! They look forward to their time with them!”

One of those Reading Buddies is Eric Pena, who is quick to point out that his love is more for mathematics than reading, despite the fact of his mother, Sharon is an English teacher at Gallup Mid-School.

“We see a change in the kids throughout the year,” Pena said during an interview April 18 at Grandpa’s Grill, where he is the manager. “Many are shy and reserved to start but become more outgoing as the year stretches out. My mom always wanted me to be a teacher, even though I would never have thought of teaching reading. We try to provide exposure to books and get them to discover the joys of reading. Many do.”

Handling four kids in an hour (about 15 minutes for each) seems like a small start, but in today’s society many of these children come from either single parent homes or both parents must work to provide for the family, leaving little time for the closeness needed by children for learning the love of education.

“Number one is the kids,” Pena continued. “We are trying to give them more tools for success in life through this program.”

Interested volunteers may sign up at the Gallup-McKinley Chamber of Commerce, and they don’t have to have a background in education; just a willingness and the time to spend with these youngest of students as they begin a lifelong of learning.

Applicants must also obtain a background check through the police department before they are allowed to enter the classroom. The cost of this check is \$40.

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