



Energizing Education receives \$50,000 donation to expand literacy program

Lisa Satayut | October 29, 2013

JACKSON, MI – Jackson area business leader **Bernard Levy** believes it takes more than a school district to educate students; it takes a community. That's one reason why he donated \$25,000 to support the expansion of the **Energizing Education literacy program**, aimed at helping elementary students improve their literacy skills.

In addition, **Industrial Steel Treating** announced it would match Levy's contribution with an additional \$25,000 next year. Levy is the former president of the company. He presented the gift to the **United Way of Jackson County** Tuesday, Oct. 29, at Jackson's Frost Elementary School where the pilot program started in January. The donations will help to expand the program to Michigan Center's Arnold Elementary, Northwest Community Schools' Parnall Elementary and specifically Grass Lake Community Schools' George Long Elementary. The long term goal is to expand the program to encompass all of Jackson County. There is one more reason why Levy chose to donate to the cause.

Levy's first wife, Dorothy, a former teacher who died 14 years ago, would spend her time mentoring and reading to children in schools. This is one way for him to keep her memory alive. "She really got into South Africa and the apartheid and wanted to expand on that here trying to reach disadvantaged kids," Levy said. "She would be right on with it," he said of his efforts to support the program. Energizing Education is a product of the county's **Cradle to Career** collaborative, which is supported in part by the United Way of Jackson County, Consumers Energy, the Jackson Community Foundation and several other area organizations.

The program strives to have all students reading at grade level by third grade in an effort to boost their success for the future. By the end of the school year in June, post-testing of students showed an overall average gain of 5.5 reading levels, said Kriss Giannetti, the program's grant coordinator. The superintendent of the Jackson County Intermediate School District, Kevin Oxley, is committed to seeing this program grow countywide. "In less than a year, Energizing Education has gone from one classroom to four schools," he said. "It's building energy and passion that transforms young lives while enhancing the quality of education countywide."

Ken Toll, the president and CEO of the United Way, echoed Levy's thoughts on the importance of the community pulling together to support the program through volunteers. "The project succeeds because of people like Bernard Levy who give their time and resources," Toll said. "We need more people involved, especially as adult mentors who are willing to commit an hour a week to reading with a child."

Volunteer mentors are screened, specially trained and equipped with literacy tools and strategies. They spend 30 minutes twice a week working with a child in a dedicated "literacy lounge." Progress is monitored by the literacy consultant. It reaches students who do not qualify for special-education services, but who are falling significantly behind their peers in reading, Giannetti said.

Levy is hoping the program will set the pace for future generations. "The individual successes of today will be unfolding in a generation and hopefully we will see more kids going to college or earning a certificate," he said. Volunteers are needed for the mentoring program. People can sign up or find out more by visiting www.energizingeducationjackson.org and the Energizing Education Jackson Facebook page or calling Giannetti at 517-841-2148.

© 2013 MLive.com. All rights reserved.



Adam Coats, 5, and his dad, Adam Coats, draw on paper pumpkin finger puppets at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Children and their parents draw on paper pumpkin finger puppets at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Jennie O'Brien reads a story to children while a slideshow telling the importance of reading out loud to children is presented at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Amber Brown sits with her son Billy, 2, at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Jennifer Barr talks to her son Nicholas, 4, dressed as a robot, during an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 201



Jennie O'Brien reads a story to children while a slideshow telling the importance of reading out loud to children is presented at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Adam Coats, 5, takes a peek out from under his mask during a presentation about the importance of reading out loud to children at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Students super hero Halloween costumes listen to a story and presentation, for parents, about the importance of reading out loud to children at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Students dressed in Halloween costumes walk between stations at a Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Kevin Oxley of the Jackson County Intermediate School District speaks during the announcement of \$50,000 of grants for early grade reading achievement at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Students and parents dressed in Halloween costumes listen to a story and presentation about the importance of reading out loud to children at an Energizing Education event at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



Students hold books in front of President and CEO of Jackson County United Way, Ken Toll, while he announces \$50,000 of grants for early grade reading achievement at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013



Bernard Levy talks during a press conference announcing \$50,000 for early grade reading achievement at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013. Levy and his family donated \$25,000 in the memory of his wife.



President and CEO of Jackson County United Way, Ken Toll, announces \$50,000 of grants for early grade reading achievement at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.



President and CEO of Jackson County United Way, Ken Toll, announces \$50,000 of grants for early grade reading achievement at Frost Elementary School on Tuesday, October 29, 2013.

Photos: (Grant Hindsley | MLive.com)