

# Student-run bookstore helps school district turn the page

By Alisa Marie DeMao

[alisa.demao@onlineathens.com](mailto:alisa.demao@onlineathens.com)

Maya Angelou and Raggedy Ann, Clifford the Big Red Dog, a Croco'Nile and Native Americans of the American West are among the characters featured in the books that parents and students are browsing through before handing their money to the student cashiers who busily handle the money and write out receipts in the student-run bookstore. And all any customer needs is a dollar - that's the price of any book.

To get kids reading, you need to get books into their hands, and to get books in their hands, it helps to make them easily affordable, said Barnett Shoals media specialist Nancy Baumann, who brought the student-run bookstore to Clarke County after her husband pointed out a journal article about a national program that provides the inexpensive books.

"We really want to build a recreational reading habit," Baumann said. "We want kids to see it's something they can do outside of school, for fun. It's important to be the owner of books, and this makes it affordable for students who have a minimum amount of funds to have books they enjoy."

That's a key selling point to Pat Waldrip and Allison Niedzwiecki, literacy coaches at Gaines Elementary School who were part of a group of area educators who visited Barnett Shoals Tuesday to get information on starting similar bookstores in their own schools. With high poverty levels at Gaines Elementary - and in the Clarke County School District as a whole - getting books into student's homes cheaply and effectively is important, they said.

"So many families don't have books in their homes, so it's important to give them access to good books," Niedzwiecki said. "It was really great to see the parents in here as well, looking at the books and talking about them with their kids."

Student "employees" from the fourth and fifth grades are responsible for ordering, inventorying and shelving books in the portable display tubs, as well as dealing with sales and running the cash register on the two days a week the store is open for half an hour before classes - usually on Thursday and Friday. The employees interview for their positions, follow a work schedule and are paid in books, two every month.

Bo Lane, a 10-year-old cashier in the fourth grade, took home "Hound of the Baskervilles" last week, he said.

"It's been good - real busy," said co-worker Ansley Aguilara, 11 and in the fifth grade, as she evaluated Tuesday morning's business.

A fiction fan, Ansley said she was able to get more books than she would otherwise be able to afford, because of the low prices at the Bear Bookstore.

Baumann began sponsoring the student-run bookstore after reading about Robin Cohen, an elementary teacher in the Bronx who started such a program in the early 1990s. Cohen's sons now run Schoolwide, Inc., a company that works with publishers to provide low-cost books for schools and student-run bookstores, as well classroom guides to help teachers encourage recreational reading outside of the classroom and involve parents.

"When the project started, it was a way just to get books into kids' hands," said Schoolwide president Jess Cohen, who visited Barnett Shoals Elementary Tuesday with his brother, Russ. Baumann used grants from local organizations, including DuPont and the Junior League organizations of Athens and Oconee County, to set up the Barnett Shoals bookstore. The books at Barnett Shoals are sold at a loss - a bundle of 100 books costs the school \$129, so charging \$1 a book doesn't quite cover expenses - but it's more important to keep the books easily available, she said.

**Published in the Athens Banner-Herald on Wednesday, October 6, 2004**