



Read to Grow

NEWS

SPRING 2009

Founding Sponsors:

Citizens Bank, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and RJ Julia Booksellers

OUR MISSION

To improve early literacy for all Connecticut children by providing books, by helping families share books with their babies starting at birth, by encouraging language development, and by promoting an awareness of literacy services.

Nobel Laureate Draws Record Crowd in New Haven

Author Toni Morrison, winner of both Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, was met with a standing ovation as she walked to the podium in the Grand Ballroom at the Omni Hotel, the venue for our sold-out fall fundraising luncheon in New Haven. Ms. Morrison emphasized the power of language and the sharing of stories with children in developing early literacy, before reading a selection from her new book, *A Mercy*, to more than 600 individuals in attendance.

In greeting the crowd, Board Chair Roxanne Coady announced that this event was Read to Grow's "highest grossing luncheon ever" with the longest waiting list in our 11-year history.

The event was sponsored by our organization's long-time supporter Citizens Bank, represented by President and CEO Richard M. Barry, who

introduced Ms. Morrison. State Senator Toni Harp was honorary chair and presented Read to Grow awards to News Channel 8/MyTV 9 and York Correctional Institution for their work in supporting early literacy.

For the first time, we offered an opportunity to help sponsor area high *continued on page 2*

"Among the nutrients necessary for a child's life is an intimate acquaintance with the language a child is going to dream in."

— Toni Morrison



Seated: Toni Morrison and Roxanne Coady, Read to Grow board chair. Standing: Susanne Santangelo, RTG executive director, and Richard M. Barry, president and CEO of Citizens Bank of Connecticut, event sponsor.

Community Foundation Awards \$40,000 to RTG

Read to Grow has received a \$40,000 grant from The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, to be distributed over a three-year period, in support of our Books for Babies program. The selection process was very competitive, according to the Foundation; it received \$4.8 million in requests, nearly double the total amount awarded. In its acceptance letter, the CFGNH cited our program as "one of the most important and innovative" undertaken in Greater New Haven.



Surrounding Ms. Morrison are students from New Haven's Wilbur Cross High School, who attended the luncheon courtesy of a donation by Discover Re.

A letter from the Executive Director: **Susanne Santangelo**

Spring is a season of growth and renewal, and along with that, hope — something we urgently need right now. It seems fitting for spring to also be a time of celebrations on behalf of children. April 19 marks the beginning of The Week of the Young Child, established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to recognize that the early childhood years lay the foundation for children's success in school and in later life. May is Get Caught Reading Month around the country, and May 11-17 marks Children's Book Week — both initiatives developed to encourage early literacy and promote the importance of children's literature. This year, these important campaigns are being celebrated amidst economic distress, when budgetary cuts in library and school spending as well as job losses are limiting children's and families' access to books, literacy services and educational resources.

Now more than ever, we need to ask, "What can I do to help?" One answer is, of course, to give what you can — your time, your books, your dollars. Read to Grow is a vital resource for children and families; the requests for our services are continuing to increase, as more and more families turn to us for books and literacy guidance. Without your consistent support, we could not do all that we do.

What each of us can do, in the spirit of this season, to make a difference in children's lives is to follow the lead of President Obama, whose support of early literacy is longstanding, and who echoes our mission. More than once he has spoken about his belief that parents hold the key to children's educational success.

In a 2005 address to the American Library Association, Mr. Obama said,

"Reading has to begin at home . . . And so as parents, we have to find the time and the energy to step in and help our children love reading. We can read to them, talk to them about what they're reading, and make time for this by turning off the television set ourselves."

Join us in celebrating our children, and take an active part in helping them learn and succeed. If you haven't read to your child lately, start now, even if your child knows how to read; if you regularly read with your child, keep it up. And spread the word. Let's make every week the week of the young child, and give all Connecticut children the promise of a brighter future through literacy.

Nobel Laureate in New Haven

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school students who otherwise might not be able to attend the luncheon, so they could hear the author's inspirational words about the power of language and the importance of literacy. Generous individuals and businesses provided support for more than 30 students. Ten advanced placement English students from Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven shared a table and got to meet Ms. Morrison at the pre-event reception thanks to Discover Re, who donated a table at the \$5,000 gold sponsor level. And several schools around the state chose to fund seats for some of their own teachers and students.

News Channel 8/MyTV 9 received our Corporate Partner Award for creating Read to Grow's public service announcements, and for arranging third-party sponsorship to support the airing of the spots, amounting to more than \$1,000,000 worth of air time over the last decade. Read to Grow's Community Partner Award was presented to York Correctional Institution. York's unique collaboration with us has involved inmates in assembling our hospital literacy bags for Hartford hospitals since 2006, and promoting literacy by providing Family Read classes (formerly Motherread) for



CT Loves to Read

The Greater Hartford Chapter of the Connecticut Reading Association chose Read to Grow to receive a \$700 Barnes and Noble gift certificate for our Books for Babies program, purchased with funds raised during the group's 2008 *Connecticut Loves to Read Day* event, with the help of Barnes and Noble stores in Glastonbury, Manchester and Canton.



State Senator Toni Harp presents our Corporate Partner Award to Jon Hitchcock, VP and general manager of WTNH, for the station's long-standing support of RTG's work.

the women of York conducted by Read to Grow staff members.

Our thanks to table captain coordinators Tina Garrity and Molly Visnic for taking on the task and doing such a wonderful job, to all the table captains and event volunteers, and to the individuals, businesses and organizations that purchased luncheon seats and made donations in support of early literacy.



Accepting the Community Partner Award from Senator Harp on behalf of York Correctional Institution are Deb Cauley and David Chaisson.

Books for Kids Around the State

Over the years, Read to Grow has grown into a place that children, parents and providers can rely on for free books. Our Books for Kids program distributes an average of 1,600 new and gently used books each week to Connecticut children in need. Supported primarily by book drives conducted by schools, businesses, civic groups and individuals, Books for Kids offers a cost-effective way to help shrink the opportunity gap and to meet the literacy needs of children and underserved programs in our communities.

On behalf of children across the state, we thank all those who have collected books for Read to Grow in the last few months.

Here are just a few of the many outstanding examples of your generosity:

Ridgefield Girl Scouts — When Ridgefield Girl Scout leader KC Peckham learned that books were needed for New Haven school children from her Century 21 co-worker Linda Anderson, a member

of the Connecticut State Library Board, KC thought her troop could take on a book drive. The troop of Ridgefield High School ninth graders placed an article in the paper, emailed friends and family announcing the collection, and put donation boxes around town. The result was a great collection of about 1,300 books.

Betsy Ross School Gives Back — Students at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School, an interdistrict middle school in New Haven, ran a book drive for Read to Grow “to give back to their community,” according to school officials, and collected 1,574 books.

Days of Caring — In celebration of United Way of Greater New Haven’s annual Days of Caring, book drives held by students at Albertus Magnus College, Gateway Community College and Quinnipiac University yielded 1,650 children’s books.

Hospitals Pitch In — Our two New Haven hospital partners responded to our call for books and ran book drives recently. The work of Yale-New Haven Hospital’s Mutual Respect Committee and a cooperative undertaking at the Hospital of Saint Raphael between the Department of Volunteer Services and the Department of Women’s and Children’s Services brought in more than 1,800 books.



Ridgefield High Girl Scouts stepped up to collect books for Read to Grow. Pictured are Alyssa Alt, Melissa Brian, Elena Cabot, Jen Duffly, Linda Anderson of the CT State Library Board, Christie Isom and Kelsey Peckham. Missing from photo is Chloe Slawson.

**With each book
you donate to
Read to Grow,
you help a child build
essential literacy skills.**



RTG’s Books for Babies Team

Meet Read to Grow’s Books for Babies team: Hospital Coordinator Priscilla Russo (center), joined by Christine Mace (left), our Hartford regional coordinator, and Erin Spaulding (right), our onsite coordinator at Yale-New Haven Hospital. Together with the volunteer services departments of our eight hospital partners, Priscilla, Chris and Erin recruit and train the volunteers who motivate parents to read aloud to their babies. Working with the hospitals’ maternity unit staff, our team makes sure that Books for Babies runs smoothly to provide a literacy bag to each family and make books available for older siblings.

BFB reaches 50% of all Connecticut newborns and their families, in partnership with: Yale-New Haven Hospital and the Hospital of St. Raphael in New Haven; St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Hartford Hospital and Manchester Memorial Hospital in the Hartford area; Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent’s Medical Center in Bridgeport; and Lawrence & Memorial Hospital in New London.

Michelle Randolph: Neighborhood Leader

Just a little over a year ago, Michelle's address was York Correctional Institution in Niantic. Today, she is making a difference in children's lives, by getting books into their homes and encouraging parents to read with them. Folks in Michelle's New Haven community call her "The Book Lady" because she gives kids books of their own, books she gets from Read to Grow.

When Michelle took part in a Motherhead group at York last spring, she learned about Read to Grow and about the importance of sharing books with children. The ten-week class was conducted by our Books for Babies coordinator Priscilla Russo and Books for Kids coordinator Linda Sylvester, both trained in the nationally recognized Motherhead curriculum. (Read to Grow brought Motherhead to York in 2006 as part of York's parenting program, and runs the classes twice a year.)

"I love kids and love kids to read," Michelle says. She does not have children of her own, but is a caregiver for her two-year-old godson, and says that the time she spends reading with him "helps me to grow closer to him."

When she returned to New Haven, Michelle called on us for books, at first for children she knew. Before long, she took on the mission of getting books to as many children as she could, bringing books right into the children's neighborhoods and onto their families' doorsteps, into churches and community meeting places.

News of Michelle's work has traveled and both children and parents now seek her out. "When I bring books, they want more," she says proudly.

Michelle believes that book ownership is key to getting children to read more. "Libraries are great," she says, "but kids want to keep books and to cherish them. They don't want to give them back."



Michelle Randolph gathers a few friends and relatives to check out a couple of boxes of books, a recent delivery from Read to Grow. Michelle has become a community leader for literacy, working to help change children's lives.

Michelle dreams of having an apartment big enough for lots of bookshelves, where children could go to browse for books to take home and keep. For now, she continues to call us regularly for books and spread the word throughout her community about the importance of books, literacy and family reading time. Having books and

reading, she says, "gives kids a chance to elevate their minds, and to feel the joy of books."

Motherhead at York is funded by a grant from J. Walton Bissell Foundation. The books Michelle receives come from the thousands you collect and donate to Read to Grow throughout the year.

Verizon Supports RTG



Michael Murphy, Verizon Wireless public relations manager, New England Region, presents a \$5,000 check to Susanne Santangelo from Verizon Foundation in support of our Books for Babies program. The grant will provide 400 newborns with our hospital literacy bag, which includes a new children's book and an informational guide on early literacy for their parents.

FIRST BOOK GRANTS

Read to Grow has assumed the regional coordination for the First Book grants for the Greater Hartford community. Grants are available to nonprofit organizations or Title I schools that provide some type of literacy service to low-income households and offer multiple book distributions to each child in the program. The books distributed through First Book are intended to go home with children to foster reading and build home libraries. Nationally, First Book has distributed more than 60 million new books to children from low-income families in thousands of communities.

For information on the Greater Hartford First Book grants, contact Susanne Santangelo at 203.488.6800 or ssantangelo@readtogrow.org.

Thank You to Our Donors for Investing in the Future

We gratefully acknowledge all who have made contributions to Read to Grow from February 1, 2008, through January 31, 2009. Your support makes it possible for us to expand our reach and to make a difference in the thousands of lives we touch each year. We count on you, just as the families and communities we serve count on us.

Nobel (\$25,000 & up)

David & Susannah Bailin*
Kevin & Roxanne Coady*
Jeff Gruskay & Donna Lechner-Gruskay*
Michael Vlock & Karen Pritzker*

Pulitzer (\$10,000 - \$24,000)

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* denotes multi-year pledge

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If we have inadvertently omitted a name, printed a name incorrectly, or categorized anyone incorrectly, please accept our apologies. Please call us at 203.488.6800 to advise us of any error so that we may correct our records.

Annual Report Available

Read to Grow's 2008 Annual Report is now available to the public. Please contact us at 203.488.6800 or readtogrow@readtogrow.org for a copy. Or visit our website and view it online at www.readtogrow.org.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Currently Read to Grow is experiencing a 50% increase in the number of requests from parents for books and literacy guidance, and we expect the demand for our services to continue to rise. Many of these families first learned about Read to Grow's services, and the importance of sharing books with their children starting at birth, from our Books for Babies program, on the maternity units of our partner hospitals. And now they are calling on us for help. These parents want to read with their children and want their children to learn and succeed; they are motivated and hopeful, and are reaching out.

Preventing low literacy is possible. With your help, all children can have access to books of their own and a chance for a bright future. Make a donation today to Read to Grow, and change a life.

For more information, call 203.488.6800 or visit our website www.readtogrow.org.



Luncheon for Literacy

For the second year, Karen Seligson and Melanie Ward hosted a festive Holiday Lunch for Literacy to benefit Read to Grow. Guests were asked to bring a new children's book to the gathering and, true to the spirit of the holiday season, were most generous: the collection yielded 546 beautiful new books for children served by our programs.



Two-year-old Alyssa, a "graduate" of our Books for Babies program in Bridgeport, shares a book from Read to Grow with her mom and baby brother. Thanks to you, Read to Grow can provide Alyssa, her brother Antonio, and thousands of other Connecticut children with books as they grow, to help support their developing literacy skills.

Going Green

You can help us go green and reduce our printing costs. Our newsletters are now available on our website.

If you prefer to access them online in the future, just send an email. Please include your name and mailing address so we can update our database.

SCSU Partners with RTG

Read to Grow is engaged in exciting partnerships with Southern Connecticut State University's Communications and Art departments. Seniors in two classes are applying their skills and talents to create materials for our programs.

An advanced video production class, under the direction of Professor Richard Glinka, will be putting together an instructional video for families based on our *First Guide for Parents of Newborns*.

Advanced photography students of Professor Yolanda Del Amo are shooting a series of photographs to illustrate the joys of parents and children reading, sharing books and spending time together.

Both projects will be completed by the end of the spring semester.

READ TO GROW BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Contributors: Robin Charney,
Tricia Bohan Photography

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Thanks for the Books!

Students who attend Noank's Project Academic Achievement were thrilled to get a shipment of books from Read to Grow.

FAST FACTS

Books for Kids provides books to more than 300 organizations that serve children — schools, child care and health care settings, social service agencies and others — each one our partner in promoting literacy and healthy development of our children.



"In the end, there is no program or policy that can substitute for a mother or father who will ... turn off the TV, put away the video games and read to their child. I speak to you not just as a president, but as a father when I say that responsibility for our children's education must begin at home."

— President Barack Obama,
Feb. 24, 2009

*Founding Sponsors: Citizens Bank,
The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
and RJ Julia Booksellers*

Visit us at
www.readtogrow.org

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