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Carol Welsh Gray, *president of Raising a Reader*

Early literacy program recognized for excellence



Raising A Reader, an early literacy program developed by Peninsula Community Foundation, recently received a 2006 Fast Company/Monitor Group Social Capitalist Award for its nationwide educational

Kathleen Jay

program that fosters parent-child bonding through an at-home reading routine.

In the Bay Area, the program, which will be recognized at a ceremony in New York City this month, benefits more than 1,000 child care sites serving more than 23,000 children and their families.

“The foundation has a 40-year history of working with families at risk,” said Carol Welsh Gray, president of Raising a Reader. “And we were concerned the children of low-income families entering kindergarten were unprepared to learn to read.”

“We knew there was a new body of research showing that reading aloud to your child is the most important activity that a parent can do to prepare their child for reading success,” said Gray, who said that the American Library Association’s and American Pediatric Association’s standard is to read to your child each day from birth.

“What we found in Silicon Valley was that most households making \$50,000 or more were reading to their kids each day. Most

households below \$50,000 were not,” she said.

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Through funding by the Peninsula Community Foundation, Raising A Reader worked to design a program to meet the needs of at-risk families.

“Our foundation offered funding to a broad collaboration of educators, librarians, government officials and head start teachers to design a program to help those who didn’t read and who didn’t speak English to engage in the shared book experience,” Gray said.

The program, which combines rotating red bags filled with books, parent training and involvement with local libraries, enables low-literate and non-English-speaking families to engage in reading with their children.

“It’s not about reading the book as much as it is about storytelling, using pictures in a book to tell a story to a child,” Gray said.

“Children learn through interacting through language — so we try to teach parents to encourage the child to ask questions and to turn the pages themselves. They increase their vocabulary, reading comprehension and pre-

dictive ability,” she said.

Currently, Raising A Reader materials are available in 11 languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Russian, Hmong, Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Bengali and Cambodian.

“Reading is the most complex of human activities — it uses 12 regions of the brain to read. When a child has good story understanding and predictive ability — that skill can help them with the difficult decoding of the print later on in life,” Gray said.

“We applaud the efforts and business acumen of Raising A Reader, which is not just a do-gooder dedicated to solving the early literacy gap among at-risk children — it is a business-oriented organization of vision worthy of imitation in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors,” said Mark Vamos, editor of Fast Company.

Launched in 1999, Raising A Reader reaches more than 56,000 children annually in 80 communities across 27 states and four countries. For more information about Raising A Reader, visit www.pcf.org/raising_reader.

PHOTOS BY TERRY LORANT/SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER
Parents in San Mateo read to their toddlers using the Raising A Reader program.



Future math teachers honored

On Dec. 1, students, faculty and friends of the City College of San Francisco’s Office of Mentoring and Service Learning honored a group of math mentors at a ceremony held in the college’s Pierre Coste Faculty Dining Room on the main Phelan Avenue campus in San Francisco.

The student mentors, who are former math students interested in becoming teachers, were selected by City College faculty to work with students enrolled in entry-level math classes. Mentors meet with students in either a one-on-one or small-group setting to help students throughout the semester.

“Mentors provide academic support like tutors do,” Christine Francisco, coordinator of the Office of Mentoring and Service Learning, said. “But they also provide a social and cultural



Students, faculty and staff attended a celebration for the Child Development/Math Mentoring Future Math and Science Teachers last month at City College of San Francisco.

support — a how-to-survive-in-school kind of thing.”

“What is really remarkable is that many of the mentors were mentees,” Francisco said. “They came up through the ranks because they are so affected how their mentors affected them.

“And the faculty are fantastic about building up leadership skills,” Francisco added.

Currently, Chuck Burke, an instructor in the math department, and Kathleen White, an instructor in the Child Development and Teacher Prep Center, are the faculty sponsors of the math mentor program, which honors the future math teachers with math teaching scholarships.

To learn more, call (415) 239-3771.

Howerton honored for outstanding community service

On Nov. 29, Pacific Gas and Electric Company honored Don Howerton for exemplary volunteer work with the Dolores Street Community Services, a program that works with the homeless and people living with AIDS. At an awards ceremony in San Francisco filled with employees, family, friends and members of the agency, Howerton received a 2005 Frederick W. Mielke Jr. Award for Outstanding Community Service and a \$5,000 grant, which he will be giving to Dolores Street Community Services.

After arriving in the Bay Area in 2003 from Tulsa, Okla., Don, an attorney at PG&E, searched for a place to volunteer.

“I had been looking for an organization to volunteer with when I saw a notice from the PrideNetwork

employee organization at PG&E informing that Dolores Street Community Services was looking

for board members,” he said.

Dolores Street Community Services, which feeds more than 120 homeless people every night, runs the only adult men’s shelters in the Mission and Castro districts, and is also The City’s only noninstitutional residential AIDS facility.

“Through volunteering I create for myself the peace of mind that I am using my time, energy and talents to help people, rather than sitting back and waiting for someone else to,” he said.



Howerton