



Reading Is Fundamental of Southern California, Inc.

Winter/Spring 2005 Issue 7

Inspiring Children to Become Lifelong Readers

RIFSoCal and the Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute Join Forces to Promote Literacy

What better present could there be than the gift of literacy? Reading Is Fundamental of Southern California was honored to collaborate with the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute this past holiday season to ignite the spark of literacy in each of the over 900 children who gathered to experience the excitement of live theatre and choose a free book to take home and keep.

...Thank you for letting our class go to your fabulous theatre. I've never been to or seen a real theatre before. I will remember your theatre always. And, thank you for my wonderful new book...

Anna Strasberg, wife of the legendary Lee Strasberg, financed the production of the children's musical "St. George and the Dragon," based on the classic tale from the Middle Ages, as a Holiday present to under-privileged children to promote literacy and education through the magic of the theatre.

"Lee Strasberg was known for a timeless quote, 'How can we dream of greatness, if we don't see the possibility of it?' Reading stirs the imagination and enables one to see the possibilities for greatness and that's the gift we are giving these wonderful children - a chance to

dream and a reason to hope," commented director Anna Strasberg.



Children choose a RIFSoCal book at Strasberg Theatre

Opening a book opens the whole world of literacy...

*Literacy is connecting;
Literacy is finding meaning;
Literacy is understanding;
Literacy is reading, writing,
listening, and speaking;
Literacy is POWER!*

~

"Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are."

Mason Cooney

RIFSoCal's Newest Partner

WELCOME to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center's C.O.A.C.H. for Kids and Their Families!

Our innovative and exciting partnership to provide **150 books/month** for children receiving well child exams, parents attending parenting classes at school sites and homeless shelters, and children participating in mental health groups at schools will begin in March 2005. Our mutual goal is to promote family literacy and motivate children and their parents to read.

C.O.A.C.H. (Community Outreach Assistance for Children's Health), operating from the belief that a healthy child requires a healthy family, utilizes 2 mobile medical clinics to provide free primary and preventive health care services for economically disadvantaged children and their families who have difficulty accessing care due to barriers such as limited transportation, limited financial resources, being uninsured or underinsured, and cultural or language issues. Since 1994, C.O.A.C.H. has provided over **70,000** medical visits for **32,000** children and their families.

*Dear Reading Is Fundamental,
Thank you very much for the book for my son. He was thrilled to choose a book and slept with it last night!*

What a wonderful program.

Julie Cooke's Corner

*RIFSoCal – a MAGIC place
where both TIME and BOOKS
FLY!!*

New books are flying in and flying out - - flying books are good! As volunteer site coordinators visit our warehouse to choose books for their 2nd distribution, they are excited to find many great new arrivals, as well as many old favorites:

Board Books: My first Alphabet book, I Love My Daddy Because, and I Love My Mommy Because; *English & Spanish publication:* Too Many Pears!; and our *most popular books*, Captain Underpants, A Series of Unfortunate Events, Bunnica, Clifford, Parts, Magic Tree House Series, Holes, Roald Dahl books, Hank Zipper Series, Judy Blume books, and Goosebumps.

Visitors also find many happy, wonderful volunteers, working hard to unpack and shelve newly delivered books while talking to themselves ... sounds of contentment and concentration!

PLEASE remember how much we value and welcome your suggestions for new book titles – call us anytime with your ideas.

Suzi's Strip

Welcome to my new column and hello to everyone I have met during my travels so far. I'm looking forward to visiting every RIFSoCal site before the end of the school year. To help me schedule my visit to attend your event, please call or email me at (818) 383-1986 or Suzanne@rifsoocal.org

I would like to share several of the exciting Literacy Based Events that totally captivated the children and me!

Esperanza Elementary School, a new site in Los Angeles, presented "Thanksgiving, What am I Thankful For?" A Thanksgiving book, read in both English and Spanish, was accompanied by a guitar and shown

on a large screen so that all of the children could see the pictures. Following was a video, made on campus, where all the teachers and many of the staff answered the question, "What are you thankful for?" It was so exciting to hear the children cheer and hoot when a teacher they knew was on camera. The children then created a Thanksgiving craft project, and the event ended with them choosing their books.

What a great day! Many kudos to Marta Gardner, the site coordinator, and to Coudert Brothers' Natalie Rodriguez and Nancy Dillon. RIFSoCal is so pleased to thank *The Coudert Brothers Law Firm*, as they recently adopted Esperanza and will be helping with all of their future events.



5th grade students read to lower grades at Montara's Literacy Based Event

535 second, third and fourth grade children from South Gate's **Montara Elementary School** participated in a two period event held in the school's library, where the RIFSoCal books were displayed. What made this event special was that two 5th grade girls read stories to the little ones. As you know, little children always look up to the older students! The 5th grade girls were very proud to have been selected to help with this project and handled their responsibilities with a lot of poise. What a super way to begin mentoring programs at an early age!

Before selecting their books, the children wrote down what they are thankful for:

"One of the things I'm thankful for is that your company exists!"

"Thank you for the book. I am thankful for all your hard work."

Mary Soto should be very proud of stimulating such a successful in-house literacy-sharing program.

Last but not least, please contact me if you know a retired educator or grandparent who would like to "adopt" one of our sites and share their love of books and reading with children.

Thanks to all of you! Your dedication enables RIFSoCal to make a difference in a child's life.

Family Literacy Success

"Thank you so much for raising awareness about the importance of children's literacy," said a grateful parent following a recent "Learn and Play at WIC" family literacy seminar. With a husband, four children, and little money, her primary concern had always been to provide her children with food and shelter, not to stimulate them mentally by providing them with time to read. She assumed literacy was taken care of at school. However, our seminar motivated her to begin taking a few minutes out of every day to read with her children. She told us that god would bless our efforts to help the people and WIC, and thanked us from the bottom of her heart for the books and resources to help her initiate this quality time with her children.



Cal State LA Volunteer engages children while parents attend Family Literacy Seminar

From RIFSoCal's Archives... ... and Phyllis Shlechter's Memories



Phyllis Shlechter at Accelerated Charter School's June 2004 Literacy Based Event

It was 1984 and I had just retired from teaching reading in N.Y.C. One day, while reading "Involvement Opportunities in the L.A. Times," I saw *Volunteers Needed for Reading Is Fundamental*. Just what I'd been looking for! I called and Sylvia Ziskind, the Vice President of Book Distributions, invited me to a Board meeting.

When I arrived, I was greeted by a most charming lady with twinkling eyes and a warm smile. She kissed me on both cheeks and said, "Welcome to the Board." That was my introduction to Ruth Grams, President and co-founder of RIFSoCal.

I spent the next four years, unpacking, shelving and distributing books to 35-50 sites and 10,000 children. My reward came when I was deemed ready to do a book distribution of my own!

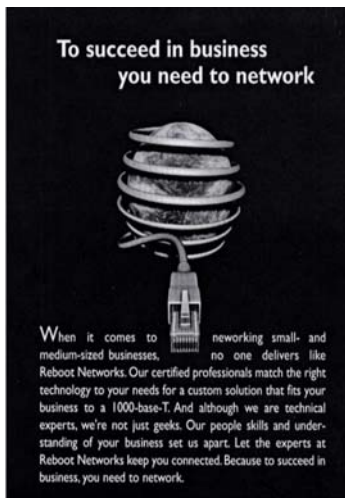
To go back... In 1966, Mrs. Robert McNamara and Mrs. Elliot Richardson, appalled to learn that school children didn't have any books in their homes, set out to do something about it. Shortly after, Ruth Grams heard from her sister that Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. had been launched in Washington, D.C.

RIFSoCal was born on a summer day in 1972. Ruth, a librarian in Santa Fe Springs, having prevailed on a few friends to collect children's books, donned her Mother Goose costume and read books on the library's lawn. Mrs. McNamara then personally came to L.A. to structure and formalize the board of directors, and help to create the first multi-site distribution project in the U.S.!

The talented Marva Shearer joined RIFSoCal when her husband, Lloyd Shearer, writer of the Walter Scott celebrity column in Parade magazine, was unable to participate. Marva, an editor of House and Garden magazine, wrote newsy letters to her extensive network of wealthy and influential friends describing RIFSoCal's bustling office and far-reaching goals. And of course, a donation envelope went out with each letter.

About that same time Sylvia Ziskind, a professor of children's literature, joined RIFSoCal and became the actual head of the program. Between 1972 and the early 80's RIFSoCal grew and grew, but that story is for another newsletter...

RIFSoCal thanks Reboot Networks for donating their time to keep our computers running...



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Alexandria House, McKinley PTA and Faculty Club, PEO Sisterhood, PUENTE Learning Center, San Miguel School, South Gate Women's Club, United Way, Women's Club of Downey, and World Reach Inc.

Are you interested in serving on a committee to assist RIFSoCal? Committees include: Fundraising; Volunteers, Speaker's Bureau and more. For more information, please email rifsocal@rifsocal.org and place "Committee" in the subject heading. We will send you additional information. Do you have a favorite RIFSoCal story? Please email it to us and we will include it on our website!

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