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Library drawing record numbers to summer reading program

By Cheryl P. Allen • Staff writer • June 21, 2010

Daisy Thompson of Taylors is making sure her four daughters – ages 7, 8, 11 and 13 – have a relaxing yet productive summer. Part of their agenda is reading lots of books through the Greenville County Library System’s Summer Reading Program.

“All my girls love to read,” Thompson said. And this summer, they’re challenging themselves by getting as many books as they can.

Hundreds more are embarking on that same challenge. The library system is reporting an unprecedented number of registrations for its summer reading program.

“We are seeing spikes across the county,” said spokeswoman Trinity Behrends.

And the trend isn’t just in Greenville. A Google search for “summer reading programs” yields more than 3 million results – everything from public library programs to those sponsored by publishers, bookstores, book clubs and more.

“Summer reading is booming,” said April Roy, youth services librarian with the Kansas City (Mo.) Library. “Our numbers this year are going to be big.”

In Kansas City, as in Greenville and other libraries around the country, summer reading programs are incorporating related activities like music, films and lock-ins.

Here, participants’ reading logs are their tickets to library concerts and special hands-on programs like “Snakes Alive.”

Less than a month into Greenville’s program, the Pelham Road Branch has registered 150 more children than last summer, and the Anderson Road location has 50 more. The Hughes main library is quickly reaching 1,000, its total for last year.

In previous years, children often came in pairs, said Gil Garrett, acting manager at Greenville’s Anderson

Road branch. “This year they have been coming in as large groups.”

“We had to reprint registrations cards to keep up,” Behrends said.

She said the higher numbers may be due to the fact that families are looking for inexpensive activities. Also, the library increased its outreach to schools this year, and program sponsors contributed more prizes.

“Popular new fiction has done a whole lot for teen readers, such as the Twilight series,” Garrett said. “Also, parents are signing themselves up for the adult summer reading program when they register their children. Some have made it a family contest of reading.”

Students’ reading skills are prime indicators of overall academic success, but librarians and educators also like summer reading programs because they send another message: Reading is not only a part of schoolwork but an important and enjoyable aspect of everyday life.

“I’m a big believer in emphasizing that reading is fun,” Roy said. “During the summer, you can read what you want to read.”

Allison Walker of Greenville recently signed up her two children and nephew for the local program. It’s a great motivator for her rising fourth-grader, she said.

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“You can get water park tickets, Chick-fil-A tickets and stuff like that,” Walker said. “And of course, in the process, she reads all of these books. I want her to keep up her reading skills.”

Greenville's free summer reading program kicked off May 28 and runs through July 31. Anyone can sign up at any one of Greenville County library branches. Call 242-5000 or visit www.greenvillelibrary.org.

Edward M. Eveld of The Kansas City Star contributed to this story.



This summer more children than ever before are signing up for library reading program.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Combine activities with books. Look for links between summer activities and reading material, including books and articles about travel destinations, movies and athletes. “We can tie a book to any activity you can think of,” librarian April Roy says.
- Lead by example. If young people see adults reading, they will more readily recognize its value. Pick up newspapers and magazines. Read at the pool. Relax with a book instead of TV.
- Talk it up. Often children have no idea what their parents are reading, so make mention of it. Tell them what you've learned and how you've been entertained by your recent reading.
- Help kids identify times to read. They might be busy (or think they're busy). Mornings

or before bed are possibilities. Consider letting them stay up late to read.

- Have plenty of reading material around. Are there appropriate books and magazines in the house, as easy to reach as the remote?
- Read aloud with younger children. Reading together — from picture books to chapter books — is a rewarding activity for parents and children.

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