



Apalachin Library's Reading Buddies Program Wins FLLS Outreach Award

The benefits of reading daily with children are hard to overstate. As many studies have demonstrated, it is one of the most important steps in helping them develop the language and literacy skills critical to lifelong success.

Last January, Apalachin Library Director Cathy Sorber established the Reading Buddies youth literacy program to help elementary-aged struggling readers and their parents meet this goal. In October, Sorber received the 2009 FLLS Outreach Award for her efforts, an annual award which recognizes outstanding library service by an FLLS member library to traditionally underserved groups and people with special needs.

The program is designed to help struggling readers gain skill, confidence, and pleasure in reading in a relaxed setting outside of school, and the structure is simple: adult volunteers meet each week at the library to simply read with their "buddy" and provide assistance, encouragement, and positive feedback. Although the meetings last only 20-30 minutes per week, they offer clear benefits for everyone involved.

Sorber's inspiration to start the program began from a conversation with a single mother who had difficulty finding the time to read with her three young children *(continued on page 3)*



Cathy Sorber, Director of Apalachin Library, was presented with the 2009 FLLS Outreach Award in October.

Wii Demonstrations Available to Agencies and Groups

Are you considering purchasing a Wii for your agency or group? If you'd like to try it out, FLLS can provide a free Wii demonstration to any agency or group who serves our targeted outreach populations.



Wii video game systems have become increasingly popular at senior centers, nursing homes and rehabilitation centers over the last few years. The virtual games are easy and intuitive to use for all ages, and can be particularly useful as an exercise and rehabilitation tool. Because they are played using actual body movements, the games provide a form of gentle, low-impact exercise that is ideal for people with disabilities or a limited range of motion. Playing Wii games can also stimulate hand-eye coordination and boost brain activity. Aside from the many health benefits, Wii games are also an excellent and cost-effective way of adding recreational group activities.

In December, we held our first demonstration at the Longview Senior Center in Ithaca, and the participants had a great time trying out sports like bowling, tennis, and golf. The staff also had the opportunity to learn how to use and set up the equipment. Activities Director Marie Hall is very excited about the possibility of getting a Wii soon. She's already brainstorming several new programs to add, including *(continued on page 3)*

NYS Talking Books and Braille Library Begins Distributing New Digital Players



A digital player and book cartridge.

The New York State Talking Books and Braille Library (NYTBBL) recently began shipping new digital books and players to replace their traditional cassette tape players. This free state program lends recorded books and Braille materials by mail to people who are physically unable to use standard print materials.

Distribution is prioritized to serve veterans and centenarians first, but all patrons will eventually receive these new players. Current NYTBBL patrons may sign up for the waiting list by calling (800) 342-3688. The traditional cassette tapes and players will also continue to be available for many years, and patrons may possess both types of players at once.

The digital players include many exciting new features, including a smaller, lighter size, a longer battery charge lasting 35 hours, and better sound quality.

Two types of digital players will be available. The standard model has eight controls for the basic operations for listening to a book. The advanced player has additional features that will be particularly useful to nonfiction readers, such as the options to set “bookmarks” and to jump quickly to different parts of the book.

The digital book cartridges are also much easier

to handle than cassette tapes, and have rings on one side to make insertion easier. Nearly every book will be recorded entirely on a single cartridge, and will never need to be flipped.

As always, patrons can request and receive their recorded books by mail. In addition, they will now have the additional option of filling blank cartridges with digital titles from the NYTBBL website.

As a subgranting agency to NYTBBL, FLLS can provide local demonstrations of these new players. If you would like us to provide a group presentation or participate in a health fair or related event, please contact Corinne Weible at 607-273-4074, x228. For NYTBBL applications and local exchanges for broken players, please contact Sarah Steinkamp at 607-273-4074 x247.

More detailed information about NYTBBL is also available at <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/tbbl/>, or by contacting them directly at (800) 342-3688.

Are you interested signing up for the New York Talking Books and Braille Library, or do you know somebody who might be?

To be eligible, an individual must have a physical disability that prevents them from reading printed materials. Eligible situations include:

- A person who can't see well enough to read conventional print;
- A person with a physical limitation that prevents them from holding a book;
- A person with a physically-based reading disability such as dyslexia.

For applications, please contact FLLS at 607-273-4074 x247.



Reading Buddies *(continued from page 1)*

individually every day, particularly since she worked full time. “I asked her if she would like a volunteer from the library to read with at least one of the children to give her a break, and was surprised at how readily she accepted. After thinking about other parents coming in and the large number of older folks offering volunteer time, Reading Buddies seemed like a natural next step.”

The program was “very easy” to set up, particularly since volunteers were eager to participate and the time commitment was relatively small. Sorber began by approaching staff at a local elementary school, who loved the idea and allowed her to advertise it through a school mailing. Initially, the program ran January through May 2009 and volunteers, children and parents alike were sad to see it end as the school year drew to a close.



In addition to increasing reading skills among its participants, the program has also offered the unexpected benefit of

building lasting bonds between everyone involved. Sorber recounts one child in particular with an attention-related learning disability who was constantly stressed when practicing reading. He relied upon a stuffed frog for security at the beginning of the program, and brought it to each of the sessions to help him relax. Practicing with his buddy allowed him to gain enough confidence and skill that by the end of the year he no longer needed the frog. At the last meeting, the family presented the adult volunteer with a frog sun catcher as part of their thanks. Another older couple “adopted” the mom and children they were working with,

and soon became regular fixtures at family events like the kids’ ball games.

Reading Buddies started again in the 2009-2010 school year, and expanded their advertising to include two local schools. Enrollment has not been as high this year, though they have an abundance of adult volunteers eager to start. They’d love to expand further if there is a demonstrated need.

For libraries interested in starting a similar program, Sorber recommends starting small. “We started with 8 pairs and that sometimes seemed like a lot. There is a lot of scheduling to work out, especially if your library is small and you have limited hours.” Secondly, she emphasizes that “although you have to supervise, be flexible. Remember that you are not teaching reading or working with professional teachers. Sometimes just the time spent together with an adult encouraging and praising the child is all that’s needed.”

To find more information about Reading Buddies, visit the Apalachin Library’s blog at <http://apallib.wordpress.com/for-kids/> or call (607) 625-3333.

Wii Demos *(continued from page 1)*

intergenerational activities and a bowling league.

If you are interested in scheduling a Wii demonstration, please contact Corinne Weible at cweible@flls.org or (607) 273-4074, ext. 228. We’ll provide the video game system, games, and all necessary accessories— all you’ll need is a TV. We’ll also offer advice and support for the logistics of successfully setting up activity programs with a Wii.

Interested in Receiving Free Books on Tape? Donations Available in February from FLLS

The Finger Lakes Library System is currently in the process of disbanding our cassette tape audiobook collection. Over 2,000 titles will be available for free to human service agencies and groups that serve our targeted outreach populations.



When: Monday, Feb. 22 through Friday, Feb 26, 9 am — 4 pm

Where: The FLLS offices in Ithaca, NY (appointment required)

Take as many as you like, we will provide the boxes— we just ask that you take everything with you when you leave.

Interested? Please RSVP by Thursday, February 11th with the date and time you want to visit by contacting **Corinne Weible at cweible@flls.org or **607-273-4074, x228**.**

If you are interested but unable to visit in person that week, you can also contact us to check if other options may be available.

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