

CROCKETT READERS SHINE THROUGH SAVE THE CHILDREN



By Ron Barry

An old proverb says, “Give a man a fish and he’ll be fed for a day; teach a man to fish and he’ll be fed for a lifetime.”

Crockett County elementary schools, in partnership with **Save the Children**, are taking that same approach with books, with just a slight modification.

You can teach a child to read – that’s great. But in order to do that, you need books. Obviously, many families, especially in rural America, can’t afford them. That’s where **Save the Children** – a global leader in child education – comes in. The organization has a goal of getting every child to learn to read well by the age of 11, and to do it by the year 2025.

In this school district, that means providing books to **Maury City Elementary, Gadsden Elementary, and Friendship Elementary** – each of which has designated a **Reading Ambassador** to direct the implementation.

At Maury City, it’s **Tammy Womack**. At Gadsden, it’s **Cassie Pearson**. And at Friendship, it’s **Ashlee Hall**. Together, that trio is working to launch a Reader of the Month initiative, providing recognition through yard signs to those children who display specific reading characteristics for each month of the school year.

“We are so excited to have all three elementary schools with the **READ** program through **Save the Children** participating in **Reader of the Month** recognition,” Womack said. “Our goal with the signs is recognition and awareness of the great readers we have in Crockett County and to motivate our students to become the best readers they can be. We are so fortunate to have the **READ (Read Everywhere And Daily)** program in Crockett.”

Womack’s sentiments were enthusiastically echoed by Friendship’s Hall.

“I agree with Tammy! Our county is so fortunate to have the **READ** program through **Save the Children**,” Hall said. “The very generous gifts in kind from organizations and corporations have allowed us to distribute invaluable resources to our students. These free books and prizes motivate the kids to read more, try harder, and achieve goals they never would have even set for themselves. They are learning that determination pays off!”

Gadsden’s Pearson is equally thrilled with **Save the Children’s** provisions for the schools.

“**STC** has given me the opportunity to hand out books for literally everything,” she said. “New books for students can mean new adventures, vocabulary words, background knowledge, and **enjoyment**. The students at Gadsden light up when they know another shipment of books has arrived. I love that handing out books has become a **normal** thing. They read at home with their parents – they get a book. They go to a local parade – they can get a book. Even for holidays such as Halloween and Valentine’s Day – they get a book. It is all about having the opportunity to enjoy reading.”

For Pearson, the yard sign project is another step of encouragement for young county readers.

“I am so excited to start up **Reader of the Month** because it gives the students and parents an opportunity to be recognized,” she said. “The kids love nothing more than to be recognized for something they are doing. Why not express our appreciation to the students and families for doing something that could potentially help and grow our community for the better?”

Hall says students gain **confidence** from their exposure to the new books.

“From a teacher’s standpoint, I love being able to work with students in all grade levels on specific skills they need to be successful in reading,” she said. “As they accomplish more, they become more confident. When a student becomes more confident, he or she tends to try even **harder**. This cycle makes our students unstoppable! The data we have collected shows that this **READ** program was incredibly successful in the 2022-2023 school year. We have some wonderful things planned for 2023-2024, so be watching! I can’t wait to see what happens this year!”

Womack says each school will determine its own criteria for choosing each month’s winners, who will get to have the sign displayed in their yards for the full month until the next selection is made.

“We will recognize students for a variety of reasons so that all students have equal opportunity to get the title of **Reader of the Month**,” Womack said.

The **READ** program was developed by **Save the Children** after a deep dive into worldwide statistical research that showed children from low-income families hear roughly **30 million fewer words by age 3** and can enter school more than 18 months behind their more affluent peers. Since nearly 90% of a child’s brain is developed by the time they reach the age of 5, **STC** sprang into action. They found that millions of kids living in rural America didn’t own a single book, and organization leaders didn’t want this to ever be the case again.

They have worked to deliver quality education to over 273 million children in the last decade, more than any other global development organization, and helped reduce the number of out-of-school children by one-third since 2000. Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, **STC** has served more than 300,000 kids in rural America alone, with a special emphasis on getting them ready for kindergarten.

If you’d like to place a bet that their efforts are helping Crockett County, there are at least three reading ambassadors that will tell you: **Book it!**

