

READING SUCCESSES, TRANSITIONS HEADLINE EDUCATION NEWS IN CROCKETT COUNTY



Above: Friendship's Ashlee Hall -- seen here with Save the Children's Sandy Arnold -- received the Read Best Program Award for 2023 from Save the Children Tennessee at its annual conference.

By Ron Barry

"I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book." - Groucho Marx

"A book, too, can be a star, 'explosive material, capable of stirring up fresh life endlessly,' a living fire to lighten the darkness, leading out into the expanding universe." - Madeleine L'Engle "There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island." - Walt Disney

"The man who does not read good books is no better than the man who can't." - Mark Twain

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." - Dr. Seuss

Back before Christmas of 2023, Ashlee Hall was among a contingent of Crockett County educators attending a conference sponsored by Save the Children Tennessee, a branch of the international organization whose mission is to stamp out poverty while improving education access worldwide. As Friendship Elementary School's Reading Ambassador for Save the Children, Hall was given the Read Best Program Award for 2023 by STC.

The organization selected Hall - and Friendship - because the school had completed the 2022-23 school year with 64 children having read 5 MILLION words' worth of books.

That's a pretty impressive number.

So what are we supposed to think NOW following an announcement by Friendship Principal Cindy Nolen - about to begin a transition herself - who emailed Crockett County Director of Schools Phillip A. Pratt this little tidbit: "Our little school just reached a HUGE milestone! Last year we read 5 million words and we have been working so hard this year to top that mark. As of May 14, we have read... 10 MILLION words! 71 kids who have reached a reading level have read 10 MILLION words! That's remarkable!"

For a reference point, that's an average of 140,845 words per kid. That's the equivalent of each reader working his or her way through one-fourth of War and Peace, a literary classic often cited as one of the longest books ever written. It's the same as reading more than three-fourths of the way through the New Testament of the Bible.

Nolen - who calls the Save the Children reading initiative the single best program undertaken since she's been a principal - credits Hall's constant encouragement to the students as a key to the school's achievement.

"Ashlee is our Reading Ambassador funded through Save the Children and she has pushed our kids to this finish line," Nolen said. "I couldn't be more excited and proud of all of our students, teachers, and staff who have supported them this year. Now let's see what we can do for 2025!"

Hall says the students are the ones to celebrate.

"Every goal we set this year, the students would meet it and just keep going," she said. "Last year, 64 students read over 5 million words. This year, 71 students read over 10 million words. They accepted the challenge and far surpassed what they set out to do. We are so proud of all their hard work."

The success of the Save the Children program isn't limited to Friendship. Maury City Elementary - which basically has twice as many students as Friendship - announced in a Facebook post that its readers had amassed 20 million words and passed more than 13,000 comprehension book check quizzes. Tammy Womack is the reading ambassador at Maury City.

At Gadsden Elementary, where Cassie Pearson is the Reading Ambassador, considerable numbers of students from each classroom have been saluted online in school posts for completing their Accelerated Reader goals.

Friendship's accomplishment is especially gratifying for Nolen, as it represents the most recent memory of her years of service as Principal there. Nolen will be transitioning into the position of Supervisor of Instruction and Curriculum for Grades K-5 for the Crockett County School District, replacing Katie Mansfield - who will now be performing that role for Bells City School, teaming up again with new Superintendent Boone Parlow.

Friendship's teachers and staff honored Nolen with a reception just before the close of the school year.

"Thank you to everyone who came to the sweet reception honoring me for my years as Principal at FES," Nolen said. "The last 12 years have flown by and I have loved my time there. Best wishes to Ms. Leah Camp as she becomes Principal and Mr. Austin Kissel who joins us as Assistant Principal. They are both fantastic! I am looking forward to seeing you all in the fall in my new role for Crockett County. I am so proud to continue to work with each of you and serve our wonderful Crockett County schools."

The 2024 graduates of CCHS hold special meaning for Mansfield, as they comprised her first group of Second Graders when she taught at Maury City Elementary.

"I had 11 boys and four girls in my homeroom and Latoya Woodson-Henning had 11 boys and four girls," Mansfield said. "We swapped classes that year so we both got to teach each other's homeroom. To me they will always be my babies, no matter how big and grown they get. It was one of my favorite years because I also got to teach them in Eighth Grade plus some other really great kids."

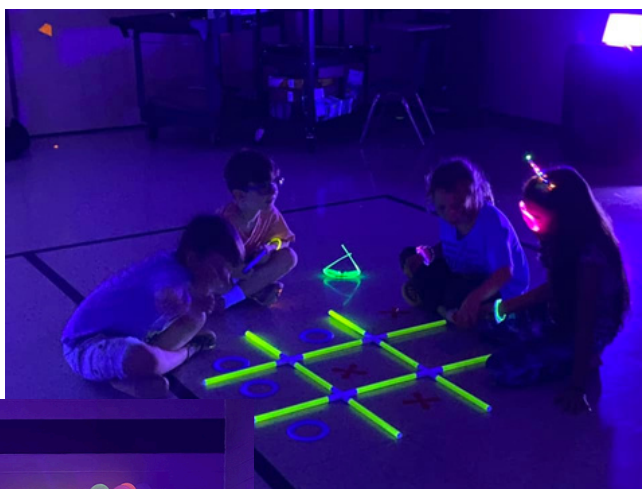
Mansfield is grateful for her time spent within the Crockett County School District.

"God has blessed me with opportunities over my career to work with the best and learn from great leaders," she said. "I am looking forward to a new chapter in my educational career at Bells City School beginning this summer. I have been blessed to have worked at Crockett County School District for the past 12 years with some great leaders and teachers. I am grateful for my time at Crockett."

Below: Teachers and staff from Friendship Elementary flank Principal Cindy Nolen (center, black top) at a reception honoring her 12 years as the FES leader. She will be the Crockett County School District's new Supervisor of Instruction & Curriculum for Grades K-5 for the 2024-25 school year.



Right: The FES kids played innovative games that glowed under the blacklights, in recognition of their reading achievements.



Above: Crockett County Director of Schools Phillip A. Pratt stands with Save the Children Reading Ambassadors Tammy Womack (Maury City), Cassie Pearson (Gadsden), and Ashlee Hall (Friendship).



Left: An example of Ashlee Hall's initiatives at Friendship Elementary: A blacklight-lit Glowing Goal Getters Party in the FES gym for all those who reached their reading goals.



Left: Ashlee Hall -- Friendship Elementary's Reading Ambassador for Save the Children -- works with children during a space-themed event encouraging reading at the Blue Cross Park near CCHS.

Right: Cindy Nolen will be replacing Katie Mansfield (center) -- pictured here with CCHS graduates Malea Kail and Gabby Claybrooks -- who will be going to Bells City School in the same position.

