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The Lilburn Woman’s Club is spending about \$14,000 this year to sponsor school visits from the Gwinnett County Public Schools Book Mobile. Two retrofitted school buses are lined with shelves and filled with 4,000 to 6,000 new books for every grade level; each student can select a free book. The Book Mobile program depends heavily on sponsors, grants and donations. PHOTOS COURTESY OF GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOOK MOBILE PROGRAM

Putting books in kids’ hands: Lilburn Woman’s Club doing its part

Group helps students at Lilburn’s eight public elementary schools choose a free book.

By Laura Berrios | For the AJC

The Lilburn Woman’s Club long has poured money and service hours into local schools. It gives dictionaries to every third grader and scholarships to graduating seniors. Members volunteer during school events and monitor the lunchrooms so teachers can eat without interruption. But this year, the 55-member club is upping the ante so children in each of Lilburn’s eight public elementary schools can choose a free new book to take home. It will cost the club around \$14,000 to sponsor school visits from the Gwinnett County Public Schools Book Mobile.

Two retrofitted school buses are lined with shelves and filled with 4,000 to 6,000 new books for every grade level. The sponsorship pays for the bus driver plus each book taken by a student.

After learning that parts of Lilburn were considered a “book desert” by Unite for Literacy, members wanted to take on the project. Unite, a Colorado-based book publisher, based its data on the number of books perceived in the homes.

“All the statistics show if you’ve got books in your home and the parents read to the children, they’re so much more inclined to read earlier and be better readers,” said Kathy Mattox, Lilburn Woman’s Club president.

Building that all-important home library was the genesis of Gwinnett’s Book Mobile program, which was the first of its kind nationally when it started in 2017.

In the past eight years, 225,647 students have chosen a new book to take home and keep through the school year program, said Jan. L. Wilson, GCPS coordinator of the library media instruction.

“The mission of the program is to put books into kids’ hands,” Wilson said. “We want every child to build their own personal library and read when they don’t have to read. ... Children with access to books in the home have the greatest opportunity to become successful readers and learners.”

The first club-sponsored Book Mobile visit was to Knight Elementary in early January. Mattox watched students climb inside the colorful bus, excited to make their selections.

“They were grinning from ear to ear,” she said. “A lot of these kids don’t have books at home.”

Students had a lot to choose from, and the driver quickly replenished the shelves before the next group arrived. School media specialists assisted kids with their selections.

Books are new and include board books, early readers, chapter books for elementary, middle, and high school in all genres, nonfiction, graphic novels, books in Spanish and bilingual titles.

Wilson, who spent more than two decades as a school librarian, orders books and takes advice from drivers who notice what’s popular among students. She said students are more likely to read a book they’ve selected.

“For kids to read when they don’t have to, three factors need to be present: choice, variety, and access,” said Wilson. “Our Book Mobile program is committed to providing all three.”

The Book Mobile program depends heavily on sponsors, grants and donations. This is the first time a group has sponsored schoolwide visits for eight schools.

“Schools reserve us sometimes for their literacy nights, Trunk-or-Treat, or to reward students who have



After learning that parts of Lilburn were considered a “book desert” by Unite for Literacy, the Lilburn Woman’s Club sponsored a program that allows students at each of the city’s eight public elementary schools to pick a free book.

IF YOU GO
Lilburn Woman’s Club sponsors Taste of Lilburn
March 1, at Parkview High School, from 4–7 p.m.
tasteoflilburn.org.

MORE INFORMATION
To learn more about the program and donation opportunities for the Gwinnett County Public Schools Book Mobile, visit gcpsk12.org/bookmobile.

completed a reading challenge,” Wilson said. “It’s usually always an incentive for something.”
For schoolwide events, the goal is for every student to take home a book.
Other multiple sponsors are the Gwinnett County Retired Educators Association, which pays for Book Mobile visits to two schools annually, and Keller Williams Kares 4 Kids Partners, which paid for book restocking fees twice. The nonprofit also will sponsor a Book Mobile visit to several schools later this year.
The program’s goal is to have the bus visit each Gwin-

nett County school at least once during the school year. Wilson said some people are surprised they include high schools, but she will never forget going with the Book Mobile to a high school and hearing a student say, “This is the first book I’ve ever owned.”

Even with all the technical devices vying for their attention, “kids still want to hold a physical book, and that just fills my bucket,” she said. “Professionally, it is probably the most rewarding thing I’ve been involved with.”

The Lilburn Woman’s Club spreads its service around, but its biggest focus is on children in the community.

Using proceeds from the club’s major fundraisers – Taste of Lilburn in the spring and the Lilburn Daze arts and crafts festival in the fall – helps purchase dictionaries for every third grader and a copy of the U.S. Constitution for each eighth grader, among other projects.

Last year the club made good money in fundraising, said Mattox, and wanted to make an impact in the community.

“It’s so rewarding when you see these kids get excited over having the books,” she said.

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