

Literacy: Local group earns praise

Ithaca Journal Editorials
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There are times when we are reminded there's more to life's equation than cynicism comprehends. There are those who need, but there are tireless people doing wonderful things to help others.

Family Reading Partnership co-founder and Executive Director Brigid Hubberman's inclusion in the July 22 Newsweek "America's Best" feature is one of those reminders.

Nominated by Ithacan and Cornell staff writer Diane Lebo Wallace, Hubberman shares the spotlight in the feature with two Georgia mothers who created a medical research foundation, doctors who work with Africa's poor, a man who created a store that "sells" food to the hungry at whatever price they can afford, and a man who uses the outdoors to empower at-risk kids. It's a national stage and some grand company, and an honor Hubberman and all those behind the Family Reading Partnership richly deserve.

For most Tompkins County residents, the Family Reading Partnership has become as much a part of our reality as walks in cool summer gorges and hot-tempered debates about everything. For years it's been hard to drive or walk around the area without stopping to stare at one of the partnership's giant "Read to Me" banners, created and spread out around the county courtesy of the group's massive contributor network and coalition of individuals, schools, libraries and businesses. The group's goal is to promote reading as a family value - particularly reading aloud to young children to promote literacy and lifelong communication skills — and they put up more than banners to do it.

The group's Books at Birth hospital program put a new, gift-wrapped copy of children's classics "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" or "Mama, Mama" into the home of every child born at Cayuga Medical Center. Every mother is encouraged to read aloud to her new baby. Every baby begins life as a book owner. The program has spread to Cortland County and may soon spread farther.

The Bright Red Bookshelf program collects used books from throughout the area. The books are sorted and cleaned, then put out on red bookshelves at various places and offered free to those who need them. The Welcome to School Book Project gives every new kindergartner a copy of "Hattie and the Fox." The Kids Book Fest brings families and books together to share and celebrate both. Give the Gift of Reading borrows from the toys-for-tots concept to offer books as holiday presents. Books to Grow On helps get book in area pediatric offices. Traveling Books brings crates of literature to daycare providers. The group even offers Children's Book Fund Grants to others who have plans

for getting literature into the hands of low-income families with young children.

That's just a sample of the Family Reading Partnership's work, and just that glance proves its efforts are as tireless and wonderful as anyone could ask from America's best. We're a richer, wiser, more literate community for the decade-plus effort Hubberman and her organization have invested in us. Although Hubberman would never say it, in the end, the honor is ours for being able to count the group as our own.

The Family Reading Partnership can be reached at 277-8602 or on the Web at www.familyreading.org.

Originally published August 3, 2005