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Reading movement just keeps growing

BY ROCHELLE RILEY
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Jo Anne Mondowney was blown away.

Mondowney is the new director of the Detroit Public Library, and her goal is to entice book lovers from across southeast Michigan into its main building on Woodward Avenue and its 23 branches around the city.

When she invited columnist Leonard Pitts to read from and sign copies of his first novel, "Before I Forget," at the main library, Mondowney hoped a few folks would stop by.

But more than 300 -- many of them men -- packed the library auditorium for a standing-room-only celebration of a writer and his words. Watching dozens of patrons read along with Pitts gave Mondowney hope for the hundreds of efforts going on across southeast Michigan to improve and celebrate reading.

"This is what people need to see and understand," she said. "Detroit has plenty of readers."

With so much attention paid to Detroit and Michigan's reading crisis, Mondowney was worried that people might not appreciate the other side: those who can read, those who volunteer to help others, those who will be the solutions.

We're counting on them to help with efforts as diverse as the 5,200-member Reading Corps mustered by the Detroit Public Schools to help children and a massive community-wide effort that will be announced soon to help adults and other family members improve their reading.

Sketchers wanted

In addition to those, I want to offer two more projects to encourage southeast Michigan residents to embrace reading.

The first is an art contest that the Detroit Public Library is sponsoring to find children's sketches to appear in my next book, "Raising a Parent: Lessons My Daughter Taught Me While We Grew Up Together."

The contest is open to children ages 9-13. Twelve winning artists will see their work published in the book and will each receive a \$500 scholarship, thanks to the Skillman and Lakeshore Engineering foundations.

Children should submit black-and-white sketches in the following categories: Holidays, Nicknames, First Day of School, Teen Clothes, Bad Words, Report Cards, Birthdays, Back to School, Discipline, First Cars, Privacy, Prom, Vacation Car Rides and Grandparents.

[Page 2 of 2]

The sketches should be drawn on an 8 1/2 -by- 11-inch sheet of paper turned sideways, or horizontally. The sketches are due to the library

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on March 26. Additionally, I'm asking parents to send in their own 500-word essays about lessons they've learned from their own children. Those essays are for a second book.

Picture this

The second project is the brainchild of renowned photographer Linda Solomon. She and I are encouraging children and adults to re-experience their favorite books through photographs.

Called Shoot Your Book in Pictures, this project asks young people -- and their parents -- all across Michigan to take a photograph that reflects what their favorite book is about or what that book means to them.

Several children from across the region are already shooting pilot photos for the project. These will be featured in an exhibit during Bookstock, the state's largest used book sale, on April 21, at Laurel Park Place in Livonia. The photographs also will travel to several Borders bookstores so that children and parents around the region can see them.

Solomon hopes to create a new social network that will be announced at Bookstock.

"We want other children who love reading and photography to express their feelings and share their thoughts about books!" she said. "Let's see how big it gets!"

Linda Solomon is right, and so is Jo Anne Mondowney. The excitement is something we all share about the reading movement. Let's see how big it gets!

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