

The Courier News

Engineering better readers in Briceville

Sun, Jan, 17, 2016 by [Heather Miller](#)

Briceville Elementary School was selected to participate in the national Engineering Better Readers (EBR) program.

This is the second year since 2012 that Briceville Elementary has participated in this event, and is currently one of only four elementary schools across the nation involved in Engineering Better Readers.



Carol Moore (behind photo) and Barry Thacker of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation explain to Briceville students the mission of Engineering Better Readers program

Barry Thacker, Coal Creek Watershed Foundation Founder and president of GeoEnvironmental Associates Engineering firm in Knoxville, explained that this program is a Schnabel Engineering funding endeavor with a mission to inspire students to become avid readers at a young age.

EBR works as a reward system where students are rewarded for reading books and passing comprehension tests.

“The more books they read the more points they earn,” said Thacker.

Students save their points to purchase prizes ranging from Xboxes, Play Station 4s, tablets, iPods, Legos, scooters, and Nerf balls.

School officials in collaboration with Coal Creek Watershed Foundation representatives Barry Thacker and Carol Moore kicked off the event early Friday morning, Jan. 8, in the school’s cafeteria with guest speakers speaking to students on the importance of reading.

Thacker dressed in character as Welsh-born mining engineer David R. Thomas, an eminent Coal Creek community leader from the turn-of-the twentieth century who donated his father Rees R. Thomas’s Welsh book collection to Harvard University in 1915. Thomas ‘time-traveled’ from historic Coal Creek to teach students a lesson in Victorian Era etiquette.

“Do you know why every man and boy is wearing a hat in this photo from 1891? It’s because we’re shy when speaking to ladies. With a tip of a hat we can express our feelings to a lady without ever having to say a word,” Thomas explained.

Thomas told students they could read more about the times in which Thomas lived by reading about it in books. “We gravitate towards stories we relate to in our hometown,” observed Thomas. “No matter what you want to be you can bet reading is going to be a part of it.”

Anderson County Mayor Terry Frank spoke next. Frank talked about her college days when she learned that the smartest students are those who are not afraid to ask for help.

“Life is kind of like a puzzle and if you know how to read you can figure it out,” said Mayor Frank. “I really love you and God loves you, and God has a plan for each one of you.”

She then asked the students what they wanted to be when they grow up. Students replied with “engineer,” “teacher,” “doctor,” and “veterinarian.”

Anderson County Director of Schools Larry Foster took the stage and quizzed students on their comprehension of the oral history lesson presented by David R. Thomas, and showed them different examples of the purpose of reading in every day life. People can read for knowledge, information, pleasure, or all three, he said.

“Reading is for knowledge. When you go to school you read for knowledge,” said Foster.

The stage curtain was then unveiled to reveal stacks upon stacks of prizes. Students squealed in excitement and sat in awe at the mountains of prizes before them.

First-grade teacher Melissa Fleming added to the ‘reading is knowledge theme,’ by telling students that the knowledge gained by reading is “something no one can take away from you.”

Patty Bachner from the Engineers’ Leadership Foundation came from Washington, D.C., to attend the kick-off assembly. Bachner described the program’s details by telling students that they had to read for points, then when they accumulated enough points they would go shopping and buy anything they wanted. “If you want the big stuff, you’ve got to read, read, and read. Your teachers are going to help you read and win your points,” Bachner explained.

Fred, Sumner, and Camille Brown spoke to students about their love of reading and why it is important. Sumner and Camille Brown asked students what were some of their favorite books. One girl said “Dora” because she could read it.

Fred Brown, a retired writer with the Knox-News Sentinel, told students how, growing up in the small cotton mill town of Cedartown, Georgia, he had acquired an early love of reading and how it inspired him to reach for his dreams.

“I loved to read. I read every book I could get my hands on. I read a book about a medical doctor who went to the deepest, darkest places in Africa. When I was reading that book it took me to brand new worlds I’d never been to. I knew at that time I wanted to be a writer,” said Brown.

Brown asked students which of them wanted to be a writer and a number of hands flew up in response. Brown ended his talk with some sound advice to the aspiring writers: In order to be a writer you’ve got to read everything you can. I read everyday. I read newspapers everyday. I went to college. Not everyone in my town went to college. I studied and studied and was able to graduate... Now I’m a retired reporter, but do you think I’m done writing and reading? You read hard. Read a lot. Read everything you can.”

The kickoff event ended with Thacker asking students what they were going to do after the assembly, to which students yelled, “READ!”