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The gift of reading

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LANCE SHEARER

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The ability to read is something everyone needs, in just about every facet of their lives. You just read those words and without your knowledge of reading, there are entire worlds of knowledge, even beyond articles in the newspaper, that would be closed off and unavailable to you.

The importance of reading for adults, and especially for children who have the ability to easily pick up the skill while their minds are at their most flexible and receptive, was the focus of “Read Around Town,” an event held Nov. 4 at Grace Place for Children and Families in Golden Gate. November is National Family Literacy Month, and the event highlighted the importance of learning to read for the entire family.

Since the 1960s, many different ways in which reading enables children and adolescents to overcome the educational handicaps they face have been modeled. In all aspects of your life.

In each area of Grace Place Town, volunteers led activities that highlighted the importance of reading. At the supermarket, uniform-clad volunteers from Publix, including Eloue Latouche, helped children find the groceries on a shopping list, and match them up with the actual canned goods or other products on a series of shelves. They then scanned the groceries in a mock checkout lane, making the point, perhaps inadvertently, that these days reading is taking on new dimensions, as for instance when it is done by optical character recognition (OCR) scanners.

The Grace Place Museum featured a “wax museum,” with seven older kids made up as statuettes who stood mute until a visitor stepped on their switch, a Staples “easy button” in front of them. Then each of them came to life, exemplifying one of the “seven habits of highly effective people.”

Enodia Alincy, 12, looking like an Egyptian sphinx, modeled No. 6, “synergize,” telling people, “I value other people’s differences. I’m a good team player. I can cooperate with anyone.”

The newspaper went easy on deep analysis of complicated news stories, with volunteers helping kids work the word jumble puzzle, and wadding up sheets of newspaper — yes, the Naples Daily News — and using them to shoot baskets at a kid-sized hoop.

But the most rewarding stop for the children was the “Grace Place Library.” Here, unlike most libraries, kids could take books home with them, without having to bring them back. Each child was allowed to choose four books from tables piled with a variety of age-appropriate volumes on virtually any subject, from Marie Curie to the Olsen twins, from the Bill of Rights to “Cow Can’t Sleep.”

“We have more than a thousand books for the kids to pick from,” said Ferguson.

They even had children’s book authors Rhonda Brazina and Ida Margolis, reading aloud from their book “Carrots for Charlie.”

Having parents read to children is a strong predictor of the kids picking up the skill early, and of greater educational attainment as they grow. As a mother’s education level increases, the likelihood her child will be read to increases dramatically, with rates over twice as high for college graduates compared to those who never finished high school.

More than 2.6 million adults in Florida — 20 percent of those 16 and older — lack even the most basic reading skills, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the third lowest adult literacy level of all the states.

Grace Place also offers after-school programs on their campus for kids from kindergarten through grade 5, and at the schools for grades six through 12.

Grace Place for Children and Families is located at 4300 21st Avenue SW in Golden Gate. For more information or to support their work, call 239-234-2411, or go online to www.graceplacenaples.org.