

THE GIFT OF READING

Grace Place holds literacy day for kids and parents. **Page 12A**

THE 'HEART' OF TEXAS

AUTHOR DETAILS 28-YEAR LIFE OF ADDICTION AND CRIME
PAGE 16A

HISTORY LESSON

AVE MARIA LAW SCHOOL, AUTHOR HONOR CENTENARY OF BALFOUR DECLARATION **PAGE 14A**

EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

CITIZEN, DAILY NEWS REPORTING BRING HOME FLORIDA PRESS CLUB AWARDS **PAGE 9A**

cover story



The gift of reading

Grace Place holds literacy day for kids and parents

LANCE SHEARER
SPECIAL TO NAPLES DAILY NEWS
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

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,” a program 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.

To emphasize the many different ways in which reading enables children and their parents, and lack of the ability handicaps them, Grace Place transformed their facility into “Grace Place Town” for the morning. With Grace Place CEO Dr. Tim Ferguson serving as mayor for the day, stations throughout the campus included Grace Place University, the Grace Place Daily News, a library, a post office, a bank, a museum and a grocery store.

“The intent,” said Ferguson, “is to demonstrate the importance of literacy 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 check-out line, 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. 2, “begin with the end in mind.” Amy Figueroa, 11, made up like a bunny, represented habit No. 6, “synergize,” telling people, “I value other people’s differences. I’m a good



Top: Authors Ida Margolis, right, and Rhonda Brazina read aloud to kids from their book “Carrots for Charlie” at Family Literacy Day on Nov. 4. Above: Eloue Latouche from Publix helps Ashley Cintora, 4, find items from a shopping list at the Grace Place event. PHOTOS BY LANCE SHEARER/CORRESPONDENT

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-scaled 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.

The problem is particularly acute in communities such as Golden Gate,



Paolo Alfaro finds another use for newspaper, dunking a wadded up sheet.



Yeimy and Mariana Gonzalez color cards indicating career choices at “Grace Place University.”

where many parents of school-age children cannot even speak or understand English, let alone read or write it. In Collier County as a whole, 52 percent of students live in non-English homes, where English is not the first language and sometimes isn’t spoken at all. In these households, the children often serve as translators for the adults, and deal with government agencies, banks and other interactions.

Grace Place has a Bright Beginnings program which brings in young children and their parents to lay the foundation for reading. Critically, the parents are required to attend with their children. Only the first level offers translation to Spanish — after that, the program is conducted solely in English, to spread proficiency in the language.

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.