

## Local

# Parents collect books for Laurel Oak's media center

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Karen Clawson couldn't help but smile as she looked out across the sea of eager faces in front of her.

"Thank you for coming to this event that celebrates two of life's best offerings — books and friends," she said. "Look at all of those beautiful books. They are just like treasures in the sand."

For Laurel Oak Elementary School students, the books certainly will be treasures and memories. Clawson and her fellow Laurel Oak Elementary School parents came together Thursday for the fourth annual Bring a Book, Bring a Friend Fun-raiser for the school's media center.

"Children want to read and they want to find good books. Those that open their imagination," said Clawson, the co-founder and organizer of the event.

"I had been in the library filling books and I helped a couple of

students find that perfect book. The look on their faces when they found a book they were interested in, it was amazing. This was such a simple way to help our school."

Parents and supporters of the school bring books to the event to help stock the school's media center. The event is a way for parents to get to know one another while doing something to benefit their children, Clawson said.

The event started in some of the parents' homes, but this year moved to The Club at Olde Cypress after more than 100 people showed up to last year's event, said Bonnie Winfield, a mother and president of the Laurel Oak Parent Teacher Association.

"We didn't want to take away from the warmth of a home, but we just had too many people," she said. "This is a wonderful way to bring together parents and meet associates and friends. It is a great place to network, talk to other parents about who their pediatrician is or what dentist

they take their kids to."

The books were piled on a table at one end of the room. The books ranged from The Cheetah Girls and Nancy Drew series to titles like "The Most Fascinating Places on Earth." Authors included everyone from Shel Silverstein and Jamie Lee Curtis to Dan Gutman and C.S. Lewis.

Jennifer Vanderheid took her daughter, a Laurel Oak student, to pick out the books she purchased.

"My daughter read these before I brought them (to the fund-raiser)," she said, gesturing to books of The Guinness Book of World Records and Ripley's Believe It or Not. "I don't think enough attention gets placed on our school libraries. This fund-raiser is a great success. I hope it spurs other schools to do it."

The event was inspiring to at least one person in the room. Ken Ferguson, principal of Veterans Memorial Elementary School, said the event is something he would like to start when

his school opens in the fall of 2007.

Laurel Oak Principal Charles Frontz said the books would be a welcome addition to the school's media center.

"You can never have too many books, especially now because we place an emphasis on independent reading," he said.

Frontz said the school has 700 books in circulation every day. He said the new books would be placed on the school's New Arrivals table.

"They will be there, but I won't promise you that the table won't be empty in a day or two," he said. "It is overwhelming to see your generosity."

The first year of the Bring a Book, Bring a Friend Fun-raiser, organizers raised \$3,000. Last year, the group raised between \$7,000 and \$8,000, according to Clawson.

The event also features an author. This year's speaker is 13-year-old Brandon Lipman.

"I feel for the cause," he said. "Books are the one thing that

empowers millions. I hope more people learn and are educated from this."

Brandon, a former Laurel Oak student and a seventh-grader at The Village School, wrote a book called "My Puzzling Smile" for his kindergarten class. The book teaches kids about a cleft lip, a split of the upper lip, which Brandon had as a child and has since had surgically repaired.

"As my book says, kids with clefts are no different than anyone else," he said. "I hope to show everyone that books have a huge impact."

Once the fun-raiser was over, volunteers box up the books and take them to Laurel Oak Elementary School, where they are catalogued and placed on the shelves.

"We are so lucky we have a strong library to begin with. This is just going to make it stronger," said Laurel Oak parent Jill Miles.

"The best part is, the kids are going to open the book and see that it was their family or their friend's family who donated it."