

Teen Illustrator Contest 2015

About the Author

KAREN D. CLAWSON



Karen Clawson's first "love stories" began while she was in elementary school as she began enraptured by stories of female trailblazers, "women who fought, flew and fired arms amongst men - Joan of Arc, Amelia Earhart and Annie Oakley."

Years later when Karen became a mother to two young children, Erin and Patrick, she devoted herself full-time to the enrichment of children's education and youth development, first by volunteering in her children's classrooms in 2001 and then expanding her efforts countywide.

Seeing her children's passion for reading and how much joy and knowledge they derived from their own beloved books, she set out to create ways to help give children of all ages have greater access to new books. Karen began conducting book drives, Bring a Book, Bring a Friend "fun'raisers" to boost inventories of books in children's libraries at school and at home. Each year, Karen's community outreach continued to expand in scope and breadth each year.

In 2008, Karen founded and launched K is for Kids Foundation, a unique teen driven, volunteer-based nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization building readers and leaders with kids on both the giving and receiving ends of its mission. High school students nearing graduation serve on the foundation's top student leadership council as K is for Kids "young executives". The teens apply their skills outside of the classroom in a real world setting, boost resumes and build portfolios, all while encouraging youngsters to read more and dream more. In 2013-14, K is for Kids' top student leaders launched Operation:Outreach with the mission to create a "ladder for leaders" program for their peers with the motto "Climb higher. Help Others." This youth leadership program guides teens in project management, from concept through execution to completion, utilizing entrepreneurial principles. And, as student leaders near graduation, they give a helping hand to the teens who want to take the lead the next year.

Today, Karen continues to serve as Executive Director of K is for Kids, a role she continues to serve without compensation as her gift to the children, saying "The rewards helping kids realize their potential far outweigh any labor involved."

In 2015 Karen was honored as one of the inaugural 25 Over 50: Vision. Talent. Impact. Sponsored by the Naples Daily News, the 25 over 50 Awards Program salutes the accomplished and exceptional leaders of Collier and Lee counties who continue to leave an imprint on our thriving community through their achievements, leadership abilities, philanthropic efforts, and dedication to the betterment of Southwest Florida.

Karen was named one of the Women of Initiative 2014 by the Community Foundation of Collier County, an award that honors ten local women leaders who, through their leadership styles, innovation, energy, and dedication of their time and talent, have helped change the face of their community and are an inspiration to all women seeking to make a difference through philanthropy and civic engagement".

Karen was one of the awardees of the inaugural 2013 MAKERS: Women Who Make Southwest Florida sponsored by WGPU Public Media, an award honoring "exceptional

women who have impacted Southwest Florida's past, present and future by serving as the "first" in their field; affecting lasting change; building community; defying social norms; and leaving a legacy."

Forty young first graders performed "White Moon, Purple Sea and the Underwater Circus" in 2010 at the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County. Karen put the book on the back burner while she concentrated on volunteering as the executive director of K is for Kids.

In 2014, Karen approached the top student leaders of the foundation about sponsoring a competition amongst local teens to illustrate her book – it would help boost the resume and build the portfolio of deserving young artists who competed and potentially help a young rising star launch their career.

K is for Kids "young executives" loved the idea - the project fit naturally into K is for Kids' mission to build "readers and leaders" and showcased the teens own Operation:Outreach initiative to help provide a "ladder for leaders" program for other teens. The contest was a creative way to showcase their efforts to "Climb higher. Help others."

"White Moon, Purple Sea and the Underwater Circus" will be Karen's first published children's book.