

Read-In Program thanks volunteers

Posted on Mar. 27, 2017



Corning and Corning Museum of Glass employees were joined by school representatives at Thursday's celebration in the C Building Café.

CORNING, N.Y. – Read-In Program volunteers who read to more than 3,000 schoolchildren in the Corning Valley during February's Black History Month were saluted Thursday during the program's Annual Recognition Event in the C Building Cafeteria.

Volunteers from Corning Incorporated and Corning Museum of Glass were joined by school representatives to celebrate this year's success, and to discuss steps to make the coming years even more successful. The theme this year was the Underground Railroad and its local historical connections, which intrigued the children.

"The theme sparked interest and pride in local history," said Claire Warren Ginnan, the program co-chair with Millicent Owusu and Harry Robinson. "The conversations between the children and the readers had depth, and the students understood the concept of learning from our mistakes. There was a sense of pride that such courageous and kind people lived right here."



Cassie Seymour, left, a kindergarten teacher at Campbell-Savona Elementary School in Savona, talked with Corning employees Millicent Owusu, Roychelle Ingram-Ogunwumi, and Tamora Long.

Three books were read in classrooms this year and local historical connections were made to each of the main characters.

- "Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad," by Ellen Levine and Kadir Nelson, about a slave named Henry who mails himself to freedom. Students also learned about Lear Green, a slave who mailed herself to freedom in a sailor's chest and eventually settled in Elmira, N.Y.
- "Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom," by Carole Boston Weatherford and Kadir Nelson, about a runaway slave who became one of the most famous and courageous conductors on the Underground Railroad, similar to John W. Jones, a runaway slave who settled in Elmira. Jones' home was a stop on the Underground Railroad and is now being transformed into a museum.
- "A Picture Book of Harriet Beecher Stowe," by David A. Adler and Colin Bootman. Stowe's classic book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," was a fictionalized story about the harsh realities of slavery which reached wide audiences and humanized the lives of slaves. Stowe had family connections in the Elmira area.



Corning employee Kevin Wasson, center, was joined by four Corning Museum of Glass employees, from left, Marvin Bolt, Astrid van Giffen, Wasson, Kathryn Wieczorek, and Hillarie Dyer.

Thursday's reception was an opportunity for volunteers to talk informally about their classroom experiences, and they enjoyed the positive atmosphere. The leadership team, recognizing the need to put others in a position to lead the program in the future, will be looking for additional people to sign up for subcommittees for the coming year's planning. There will be a strong focus on succession planning and strengthening the existing partnership with the schools and classroom teachers.

The program is sponsored by four employee resource groups: Black Growth Council, Black Technology Network, Inclusion, and The Society of Black Professionals, said Millicent, who co-founded the program with Harry Robinson and Leon Washington.

"The program is educational not only for the children, but for most of the volunteers as well," said Millicent, a senior process engineer with MTE/MPE Process Engineering. "It is an opportunity to connect with our local communities through their school districts, and it is rewarding to give back."

The volunteers like making a difference in the lives of children.

"I have seen the power and impact that this program has, and I know that we are influencing the lives of hundreds of children," said Stacie VanSkiver, an MTE human resources manager. "Our time in the classroom provides the children with an early foundation of the importance of diversity and respect."



Corning employees Brandy Fuller, Arnette Brooks, Adeola (Didi) Adeusi, Stephanie Ferree, and Jill VanDewoestine.

James Youngman, a project engineer in MTE, said in one of his classrooms, a student raised his hand and excitedly said he knew of a house in his city that was part of the Underground Railroad, sparking a flurry of local history stories from other children. "The children were well-prepared and the discussion time was very interactive," he said. "Their questions and enthusiasm made it a rewarding experience."

Stephanie Ferree, a knowledge analyst at Sullivan Park, said there is not enough black history taught in most schools' textbooks. "The stories this year introduced the children to ordinary people who did extraordinary things," she said. "I get a lot of satisfaction in knowing that we are teaching them a part of history they may have never known."

Arnette Brooks, a chemical technician at Sullivan Park, said she gets excited because the children are eager to learn. "They are like little sponges; they soak up the information we are reading to them," she said. "This year, I also learned more about the Underground Railroad and its local connection than I knew, and I want to learn more."

The program is another way that Corning shows its commitment to the region, Claire said.

"This is an opportunity to spark interest in students to think about a positive future for themselves and others," she said. "The conversations we have among volunteers are important and might not happen without the program. The messages are always positive and the students relate to making good choices. We influence a positive future by telling the truth about the past and learning from it."



"The children were well-prepared and the discussion time was very interactive. Their questions and enthusiasm made it a rewarding experience," said James Youngman, a project engineer in MTE.