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Duke Energy Funds Real Men Read Program For S-OCS Kindergartners

Staff Report



A group of eight local men recently volunteered their time to take part in the United Way of Monroe County coordinated Real Men Read Program, funded by Duke Energy. Pictured above are, left to right: Ashley Hall, Director of Community Initiatives at United Way of Owen County, Rick Smeltzer, Jake Mincey, Darrell White, Greg Denny, Steve Bahr, John Fuhs, Bruce Fisher, Brock Beeman and Ashley Schoolman of the Monroe County United Way. (Courtesy Photo)

“Real Men Read” has begun its pilot season at Spencer-Owen Community Schools (S-OCS), bringing male volunteers into kindergarten classrooms once a month to read a story, visit with the students, and demonstrate the fun and value of reading. Each student receives their own copy of the book being read so that they can follow along with the story and enjoy it again later.

The classroom visits will continue through February of next year.

Duke Energy Indiana Community Relations & Economic Development

District Manager Steve Bahr noted that children in the early grades often lack male role models in education. “Real Men

Read” brings men from the community into the classroom to share their love of reading and demonstrate that even ‘real men’ read for fun. This message is especially important to boys, who often suffer a discouraging lack of adult male role models who visibly prioritize literacy. Additionally, all children benefit from following along to a fluent reader, and enjoy time spent with a fun, caring, regular classroom visitor. “Real Men Read” encourages Spencer-Owen students to embrace reading and build a foundation for future success in education and life.

Bahr said a similar program originated in the Terre Haute area, bringing local men into kindergarten classrooms to read a book each month over five months and provide each student with a copy. Each

volunteer is assigned their own classroom at one of the S-OCS elementary schools, which helps students build a rapport with a positive male volunteer from the local community.

“A lot of kids aren’t used to having male figures read to them, so it’s having that positive male figure in front of them, showing them reading is good,” Bahr explained. “Inside that book there is a name card where they can write their name and keep that book. The thought process around that is they take the book home and if they haven’t already, start building their own library.”

The Duke Energy funded program is administered through the United Way of Monroe County.

“We didn’t want to come in and initiate a program and it go over really well and then not be able to support it the following year, so Duke has funded for two years,” Bahr said. “It seems to be a very collaborative community effort as far as drawing the schools and communities together. It’s not to say that we won’t fund the program beyond that two years, but we recognized the program in another location where we saw the effects and benefits it had and S-OCS Superintendent (Greg) Linton was very open in discussing it. He saw the value as well and if it wasn’t for him taking it to the school board, we wouldn’t be anywhere with it.”

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