



## **Rotary Clubs of Ames Early Literacy Project Step Into Storybooks Event**

This annual event provides fun literacy-rich experiences designed to inspire families to enjoy reading at home and nurture their children's comprehensive development in the first five years.

**Why:** Early relationships and experiences influence how children's brains develop. Parents are their children's first teachers. Too often, parents and caregivers don't know the most effective ways to share books with children ages 0-5 or how to provide experiences that help their children learn. Some families don't have good quality children's books at home. Children who enter school behind their peers in basic literacy are likely to fall further behind in grade level reading in successive years.

**What:** Step Into Storybooks is a free community event. The purpose is to inspire families to read and talk regularly with young children and to provide stimulating literacy-rich environments at home. Each year a theme focuses on an area of early childhood development. Interactive stations feature age-appropriate children's books and encourage families to explore activities related to the story together. Volunteers, many in storybook costumes, greet and interact with guests. Each child can select a book to take home and enjoy with their families.

**When:** For six years Step Into Storybooks has been held in Ames on a Saturday morning in the spring because April is the Month of the Young Child. The hours are just 10 am to noon so families can go home for lunch and naptimes.

**Where:** Step Into Storybooks was held at the high school cafeteria for four years and the middle school gymnasiums one year. On March 29, 2014, it was held in the newly renovated Ames Community Preschool Center with 19 science-related stations located in the classrooms, lunch room, gym, and Raising Readers Room. All these sites accommodated 1,000 participants and allowed space for many strollers to maneuver. Indoor space is needed if weather is bad.

**Who:** Ames Morning Rotary launched the first Step Into Storybooks in 2009 with support from a District 6000 grant. Everyone is welcome. Concerted efforts are made to reach families living in low-income neighborhoods and with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Rotarians volunteer on the day of the event, along with a wide variety of community folks, such as members of service groups, agencies, and businesses, retired educators, and high school and university students.

**How:** The planning team includes members of Rotary Club of Ames Morning, Rotary Club of Ames, Raising Readers, and Ames Public Library as well as individuals with expertise in the theme. Invitations are emailed to families. Fliers are distributed by the library, human service agencies, preschools, childcare providers, and low-income neighborhoods. Signs on CyRide buses promote reading to children. Ames Morning Rotary and other local sponsors provide funds for theme-related books, station materials, and publicity.

## Ames 2014 Step Into Storybooks Event

