

# Rotary Club plants reading seeds with kids

By Jamie Verwys

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When Sahuarita resident Randy Van Nostrand felt inspired when he volunteered with kindergartners 20 years ago.

Enough to write a book under the moniker Grandpa Gardner titled "What A Seed Needs to Grow," all about the process from seed to plant.

Flash forward to April, and Van Nostrand had become the chair of the Foundation Committee with the newly chartered Rotary Club of Sahuarita, which has about 30 members. And they needed a good project.

"We had an opportunity through the new Rotary Club to make the books available for the printer to distribute," he said. "There was a district grant available. We were brand new and decided, let's just distribute the books to kids."

The Rotary Club partnered with the Sahuarita Unified School District to distribute copies of the book to every kindergarten student in the district.

"We were also able to personalize the books from the printer where the inside front cover has the logo with the Rotary Club and it's inscribed 'Read a book, plant a seed,'" he said. "There's a place for kids to put their names."

Kids at SUSD schools ar-



SUSD photo

Rotary Club of Sahuarita members read "What A Seed Needs to Grow" with kindergarten students.

en't just receiving books, they are also getting a firsthand experience with gardening.

Rotary Club members provided pots, soil and seeds to the students on the book drop-offs and helped plant them. Since then, Rotary Club members have visited the classrooms several times to read to the kids and check on their plants.

The first book distribution happened Sept. 8 at Wrightson Ridge School and kindergarten teacher Rosa Alvarado said it had a big impact on her students already.

"They (Rotary Club members) were really hands-on and the kids absolutely adored it," she said. "They got the books, got to plant seeds with them... A lot of these kids don't get that at home sometimes."

"It's promoting the environment and growing plants, which ties in so much with what we are learning about with seeds and the life cycle."

Alvarado said the students were excited to meet a book author and they take pride in learning about community helpers.

"Their eyes got big...to have the author come in and actually say I wrote this, they were like, 'oh, my gosh' — it was like a celebrity," she said. "It's especially great that they are able to take the book home because a lot don't have access to books all the time."

"Kids come into kindergarten not knowing how to hold a book, so it's special to them and they were proud to take their book home."

For her, this project brings good to kindergart-

ners in and outside the classroom.

"Overall it was a great experience," she said. "It's really nice the people in the Rotary Club are doing amazing, kind things just to be kind and promote peace on earth."

Van Nostrand said they underestimated bulk buying and were able to print more books than planned thanks to a \$1,000 donation from a local charity that the Rotary District matched. They've been able to give out over 500 books.

"We had a wonderful opportunity for a collaborative team effort," he said. "It was really the result of wonderful synchronicity."

They have 100 extra books they plan to take to Continental School District next, and Van Nostrand hopes the project expands to other Rotary Clubs.

Above all, he hopes the books help to spark a love of reading for young people.

"Number one, they need to learn to read one book. If they can read one, they can read two," he said. "Number two, a love of reading. Another thing is it helps them to understand where food comes from. I hope it gives the kids a love of reading and a sense of what they can accomplish."

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