

Coast Weekly

Reading opens the door to different worlds and learning new things.

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Sep 19, 2022



First graders at Los Padres Elementary got a free book from Kiwanis Literacy Club of Salinas on Tuesday Aug.16. The students will receive a book each month during the school year.

Celia Jiménez here, thinking about how much I enjoyed reading books as a kid. I used to go to my town's library every week and check out several books at a time (we didn't have a library in our classroom nor a group of people delivering books to us at school).

I'm thinking about this because of an experience I had recently with the Kiwanis Literacy Club of Salinas. On a sunny Tuesday, Nina Wolff and Becky Davis, both members of the organization that is made up of retired teachers who want to instill love for reading to small children, were walking into Los Padres Elementary in Salinas with Principal Linda Barrera. They both went there to deliver a new book to the school's first grade students: Each kid waited in line to get a book in Spanish—*Yo Puedo Ayudar* by Edison Mena.

Los Padres Elementary, which is part of the Salinas City Elementary School District, offers a dual immersion bilingual education program with the aim of helping students be proficient in both English and Spanish. “It's important that we can reach them where they are and help them progress their language skills,” says Mitchell Huerta, upcoming fundraising committee chair for the Kiwanis Literacy Club.

The former teachers carefully select which books they will deliver each month. “They look over the books that would be grade-level appropriate and, looking at the time of the year, where their development is,” Huerta says. The Kiwanis Literacy Club raises money to purchase the books, which are then free for the first-graders. Kiwanis buys the books, for between \$1.25 and \$2 apiece, from Scholastic, and at these monthly events distribute about \$100 worth of books . The next distribution is coming next week.

Receiving a new book every month helps young students build their own little libraries at home and they have new stories they can read to their parents or siblings.

“When children have their own library at home, it's proven that they become readers,” says Clifford Gilkey, a Kiwanis member in charge of purchasing the books. For Gilkey, the best part of delivering book is the kids' reactions: “It's really exciting to see their faces light up and have their own book and [they ask], ‘can I write my name in this book?’”

Currently, Kiwanis only delivers books at Los Padres, but they are hoping to expand the program to other schools. “We want to expand this program so we can help more students and teachers and families,” Huerta says.

Reading is one the most important skills kids and adults can develop. It helps expand vocabulary and learn about new topics, not to mention developing a useful skill for daily life.

If you would like to learn more about this initiative, visit kiwanis-salinas.org or email kiwanis.literacy.salinas@gmail.com.