



ures that illustrate the illiteracy problem in America. According to the National Assessment of Education Policy, in 2000, 29 percent of all high school graduates could not write a coherent paragraph on any subject, and 39 percent of fourth-graders scored below the basic test levels.

The result of this problem can easily be linked to the fact that 71 percent of Americans arrested are illiterate, he said.

Aragon said his penchant for reading when he was young played a major role throughout his career and he hopes this program will have the same effect on the lives of these high-risk children.

"The focus of this program is to empower children of all socioeconomic segments of society to become hooked on reading rather than drugs and/or alcohol and to provide them the necessary leverage to be successful with their life," Aragon said.

"The vast majority of our youth have sharp, alert minds and can achieve tremendous success if someone can help them switch their focus from negative influences and motivate them to see their own value and potential."

Davidson said the 14 people who make up the A Bookcase for Every Child committee are all civic-minded individuals who possess a different talent that will facilitate the success of the program.

The committee will decide which children will receive the bookshelves. Committee members include Amanda Moore, director of Bailey Library at Hendrix College; Mary Boyd, director of Conway Housing Authority; and Bill Hegeman, who served as general manager of Conway Corp. for 32 years.

Hegeman said he expects people in the area to really respond to the program since illiteracy is something that affects the whole community.

"We have the opportunity to put books in children's

hands and they have ownership interest in the bookshelves and books, which will encourage them to read," he said.

Aragon said he is not aware of any other program like this in the United States.

"It's nice to know it is coming from Conway," he said. "It's a novel program that will stand alone and people in other areas will probably start adopting it. I could see other police chiefs getting involved in a program like this."

Davidson said the money used to buy the supplies to build the bookshelves will come from the sale of his book, "Learning, Earning and Giving Back." Davidson has always donated a portion of his book sales and now they will go toward the bookshelves program.

The book can be purchased at the Log Cabin Democrat at 1058 Front St.

Davidson said this is a way to get more people involved in the project, rather than having a fund raiser or seeking grants for the program.

There have been five bookshelves built so far and the construction begins in earnest on Sept. 1. Davidson said that local craftsmen, including Mickey Cox, are volunteering their time and will construct 50 bookshelves at a time.

Davidson said the goal of the program is to donate 225 bookshelves.

Those who want to donate books may drop them off at any of the following locations: Log Cabin Democrat; Cornerstone Bible Church, 1905 Dave Ward Drive; Head Start Central Office, 707 Robins St.; LifeWord Broadcast Ministries, 609 Locust Ave.; Chick-Fil-A Restaurant, 1115 E. Oak St.; Conway Area Chamber of Commerce, 900 Oak St.; and United Way of Faulkner County, 1301 North Museum Road. People wanting books to be picked up may call 329-3891, ext. 100.

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Log Cabin Democrat

Kids to get books, place to keep them

Shelves being built to hold volumes donated

By JEREMY GLOVER
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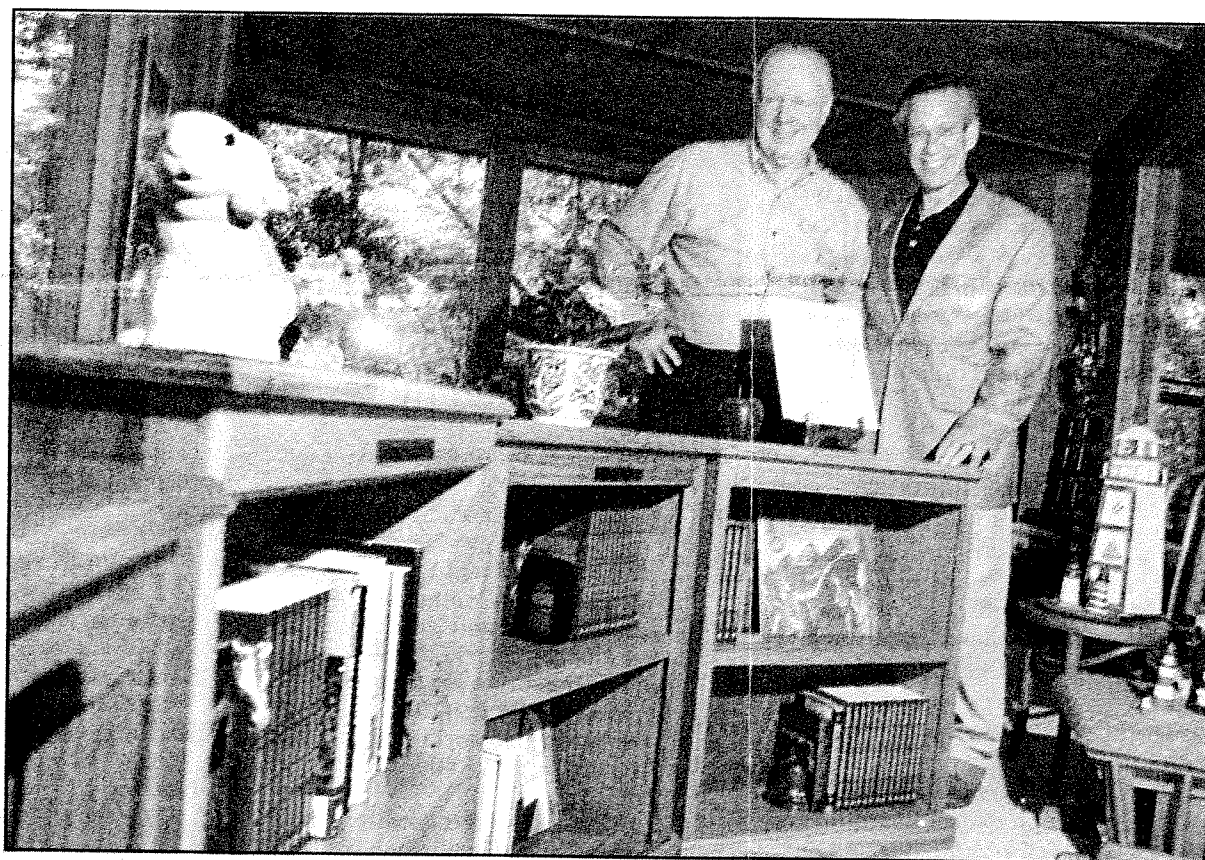
Every day children are born into dire, poverty-stricken situations in which they will never own a book, therefore missing the opportunity of being exposed to new worlds, cultures and ideas through reading.

Jim Davidson of Conway, a nationally syndicated columnist, Police Chief Randall Aragon and a cross section of civic-minded people have come together to establish a literacy program that takes a fresh, unique approach to a problem that deeply affects our society.

The program, A Bookcase for Every Child, aims at providing children in low-income families in the area with an oak bookcase personalized with their name.

"We want to give hope and encouragement to lots of children in low income families that don't have books," Davidson said.

There will also be a Gently Used Book Drive beginning Monday, Aug. 15, to provide the children who receive a bookshelf a starter set of books.



Children around Conway will have new bookshelves to hold their books courtesy of the efforts of Jim Davidson, left, and Police Chief Randall Aragon. ANTHONY REYES PHOTO

Davidson said he has dedicated the rest of his life to improving literacy, and he found an eager partner in his latest endeavor in his close friend Aragon. The two became friends when Aragon first applied for the police chief position five years ago and their friendship grew as they discovered each other's love of books.

So when Davidson came up with his latest literacy cam-

paign he quickly enlisted Aragon to co-chair the program. This led to a meeting with Mayor Tab Townsell and soon a number of other concerned residents joined their ranks to combat illiteracy.

Reading is something Aragon credits as a guiding force in his life ever since his aunt gave him a copy of "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London when he was 11 years old. He first thought that

his aunt must have been mad at him since she gave him a book, but he quickly finished the book, moved on to London's other tales and was then hooked on reading.

"It gave me the rewarding gift of reading where I could travel around the world in my mind," he said.

Aragon cites a number of fig-