



JIM DAVIDSON

## Changing the face of literacy

When we began our Conway Bookcase Project back in 2005, several of us asked God to bless it. We should not be surprised when He does, right?

After several years of hard work we are now beginning to feel like we are changing the face of literacy in America. It won't happen overnight, but it will happen. What we are doing is changing the focus of large sums of money and replacing it with a sense of "ownership" by the good people here in our community and then spreading the concept to other communities all across the nation.

Our focus is on parents and what is taking place regarding literacy in the home, and should not be confused with our nation's schools and the good job many of them are doing to educate our children.

When our nation's children first get to

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the school house door, we want them to have a good foundation for language and reading and a zeal for learning that only comes when parents purchase books, and then take the time and make the effort to read to and with them on a regular basis

Many parents already do this and are to be highly commended, but many others don't read to their children for a myriad of reasons. In many cases these parents can't read themselves, because more than 44 million adults in our nation are functionally illiterate and 32 million of these cannot read a simple sentence. In time, we plan to be part of a movement to change this.

One of the real problems that we must first overcome is awareness. The majority of us are literate -- that's the skill you are using right now to read this column. Most of our daily contact is with others who are literate, and we don't see the large subculture of people (more than 20 percent) who can't read and miss the real opportunity for true success. My daughter and her husband own and operate a Pawn Shop in another community. She tells me that during the course of a day she has to fill out paperwork for countless individuals who can't read or write.

The purpose of our bookcase project is two fold. First, we are building personalized bookcases and giving them to children in low-income families, along with a starter set of good "gently used" children's books. We also have volunteers who read to these children each week at our local Head Start Centers. These children are those most at-risk and the ones we want to focus on, because they really need our help.

Our next objective is to create awareness with every citizen in our community about the need for literacy and personally involve as many of them as possible. We accomplish this by holding an annual "Bookcase Literacy Banquet" and inviting every person to attend. To this point we have probably had between 2,000 and 3,000 directly involved in one way or another, either giving books, reading to children, building bookcases, helping to plan and carry out the banquet and our annual awards ceremony. Our music is "family friendly" and we will change the style each year to attract more and more people to the cause of literacy.

One of the unexpected blessings is the support we have received from our local public officials. We don't need or want public money, but we do want and need their support. Our state representatives, state senator and county judge have attended most all of our functions. The governor has also given our committee a proclamation designating "Bookcase Literacy Week." Recently we met with him and he agreed to send a letter to every governor in America asking them to get involved. This all takes time, but we are changing the face of literacy in America.

*(EDITOR'S NOTE: Jim Davidson is a public speaker and syndicated columnist. You may contact him at 2 Bentley Drive, Conway, AR 72034. To begin a bookcase literacy project visit [www.bookcaseforeverychild.com](http://www.bookcaseforeverychild.com). You won't go wrong helping a needy child.)*