

# Log Cabin Democrat

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## Starting a lifetime habit

### 50 children given books, bookcases in literacy program

By JEREMY GLOVER

LOG CABIN STAFF WRITER

Malachi Mullins, 4, has an old bookshelf with a paper backing where he keeps his books like "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" that he reads to his 5-month-old sister.

Decked out in a sharp blue suit, Mullins was one of 50 children to receive a personalized oak bookshelf Sunday as part of A Bookshelf for Every Child literacy project.

Mullins and his mother, Lucy Reynolds, were among the families on hand to receive a bookshelf and starter set of books at a ceremony at Cornerstone Bible Church.

"He loves books," Reynolds said.

A Bookshelf for Every Child literacy campaign's aim is to



**Malachi Mullins, 4,** looks through the starter set of books he received Sunday afternoon from A Bookcase for Every Child literacy campaign. Besides the set of books, Mullins also received an oak bookcase personalized with his name at the ceremony at Cornerstone Bible Church. JEREMY GLOVER PHOTO

hook children like Malachi into being lifetime readers.

The project is the brainchild of Jim Davidson of Conway, a nationally syndicated columnist, who was looking for a fresh, unique approach to combating illiteracy in the community.

Davidson said the oak bookshelf that becomes the child's property is the essential part of the project. That sense of ownership will encourage the child

to add to his or her collection of books and pursue reading throughout the formative years, Davidson said.

Davidson enlisted his friend, Conway Police Chief Randall Aragon, to co-chair the committee that arranged for the construction of bookshelves, collection of books through a book drive and the selection of children to be recipients of the bookshelves.

At the ceremony, Aragon

talked of how he developed a love of reading after his aunt gave him a copy of "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London when he was 11 years old. Aragon said reading is something that guided him throughout his professional life, and he stressed the importance it plays in the criminal justice system, where he said 71 percent of those arrested are not literate.

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"They say a quality education is America's most cost-effective crime-prevention program," he said. "They say that literacy actually deters our youth from criminal behavior."

The keynote speaker of the ceremony was Amanda Moore, director of library services at Hendrix College.

Moore said her mother told her repeatedly as a child that books were her friends and to treat them as such, with respect and gentleness.

"I think growing up with that attitude that books are my friends is something that influenced my entire life, and not only the way I treated books, but what I chose to do with my life," she said.

Moore said reading opens hearts and minds and plants seeds that help the mind grow and develop.

"How could we dream? How could we grow? How could we learn?" she said. "In my mind it is impossible."

Members of A Bookcase for Every Child committee selected children in the community to receive a bookshelf and a starter set of books that included a dictionary and an illustrated children's Bible.

The committee members include Conway Mayor Tab

Townsell; Moore; Mary Boyd, director of the Conway Housing Authority; and Bill Hege-man, former general manager of Conway Corp.

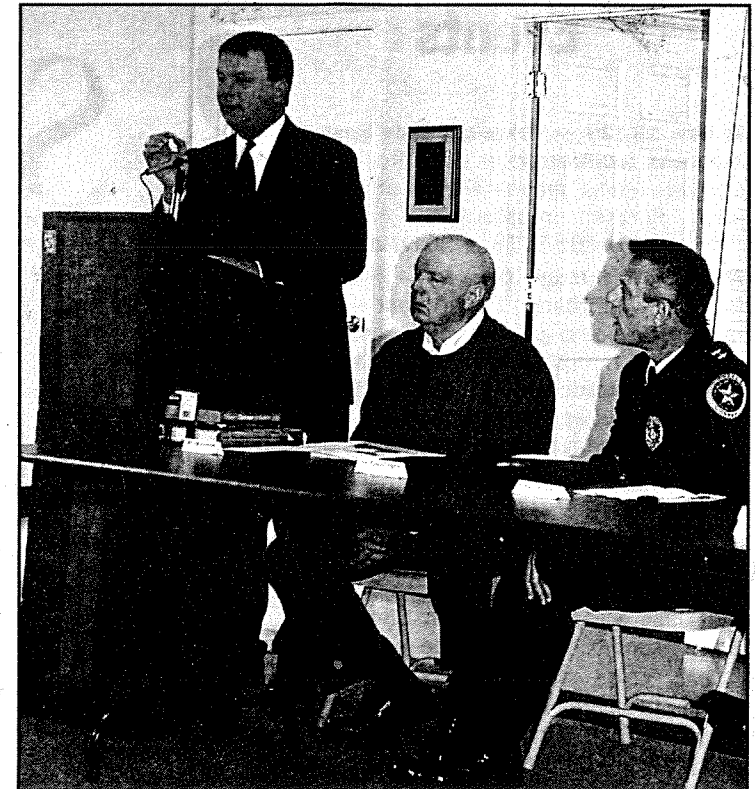
The money used to buy the supplies to build the bookshelves came from the sale of Davidson's book "Learning, Earning and Giving Back." Davidson has always donated a portion of his book sales, which now go toward the bookshelves program. Davidson said he prefers this avenue of raising funds to purchase the materials instead of seeking government grants, fund-raisers or private donations.

"What better way to fund a literacy campaign than buy a book," Davidson said. "I can't think of any."

Mickey Cox and other local craftsmen donated their time and expertise in building the bookshelves, so the only cost was the oak used to build them.

Davidson said this is the first of what will be an annual A Book for Every Child literacy campaign. He said a list has already been compiled for some of next year's recipients of a personalized oak bookshelf.

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**Mayor Tab Townsell** speaks at A Bookcase for Every Child ceremony Sunday at Cornerstone Bible Church as Jim Davidson and Police Chief Randall Aragon listen. The literacy campaign gave 50 children a personalized oak bookshelf and a starter set of books. JEREMY GLOVER PHOTO

## Log Cabin Democrat

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