

Local libraries kick-it up a notch:Summer Reading program gets students excited about books

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BONITA SPRINGS — Does the word “library” conjure up images of a dour librarian shushing playful children and whispering teens?

Local libraries shattered that stereotype this summer with the annual summer reading program, which brought snake petting, sword fighting and Japanese drumming to the library.

At South County Regional Library, visitors were more likely to catch librarian Jodie Raddatz dancing than shushing. Raddatz runs the teen programs, leading with contagious enthusiasm.

“It gives me a chance to get to know the kids on a more personal level,” she said.

The summer reading program ended June 30 with an End of Summer teen party, where participating youth could redeem “teen bucks” they earned throughout the summer by writing book reviews and attending programs. Prizes included books, games, DVDs and more.

Top honors went to sisters Mikayla and Madison Lindsey, who both earned more than 100 teen bucks. “We read every single morning and night,” said Mikayla, who beat her sister with 162 bucks.

Sibling rivalry might have helped fuel the passion for reading, said their mom, Jennifer. “They read outside, and they read inside,” she noted. “They read by the pool instead of swimming. I think they read while they were supposed to be sleeping.”

Nearly 800 children participated in the summer reading program at South County, including about 70 teens. That was enough to pack the meeting room each Tuesday night for special programs, which included Manga drawing, balloon sculpture and improv.

Teens were encouraged to write short reviews after finishing a book. Raddatz posted the reviews all around the library, which she says helps teens see that others are reading.

“The big social stigma of the library and reading not being cool is always present,” Raddatz said. “You kind of gotta hook ‘em into it sometimes.”

Younger readers wrapped up their summer reading with a game of World Atlas Bingo,

selected to compliment the “One World, Many Stories” theme.

“Every program is designed to help them learn something,” explained Joanne Parker Childs, head of the library’s Youth Services. “We always put books out related to the theme, and they check them out.”

Bethel Randall helped her four small children scan their Bingo cards for geography words such as the Mojave Desert, Cascades Mountains and Ganges River.

“It gives them a fun incentive,” said Randall, adding, “I’ve been blessed with voracious readers.”

Meanwhile, 10-year-old Chasity Clemmons shot both hands up in the air while shouting, “Bingo!” She visited the library regularly throughout the summer to check out books in the “Hot Dog and Bob” series. Her favorite program was “Tales from India.”

The summer reading program was sponsored by Friends of South County Regional Library, which donated \$25,000 this year to equip the meeting room with tables, chairs and a sound system.

“It’s great to see the kids in there,” said Friends of South County Regional Library president Karen Katz. The Friends raise money through \$15 annual memberships, ongoing used book sales and concerts during season. “We’re trying to support the library in any way we can.”

Since 2004, the Friends of South County Library have contributed more than \$100,000 to the local library, Katz said. Those funds have spawned many exciting programs, allowing the library to offer much more than a quiet place to read.



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