Written by By Kimberly A. Gaona Sun Correspondent
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As the summer begins and school wraps up, it is not uncommon to find students, teachers and parents reflecting on what did or did not make the school year great.

The weather begins to warm up, students become children again, assemblies are held for the various extra-curricular activities and hard working teachers and staff get to relax for a couple of brief months before beginning to plan for the next school year.

One group of volunteers is taking a much deserved breather after instituting the Gallup Reads program.

For the first year ever, a group of volunteers joined Gallup Reads and each read to all of the Kindergartners at Stagecoach Elementary three days of the week. Diana Romero, the Gallup Reads Coordinator, said that the program wouldn’t have happened without the help of Superintendent Frank Chiapetti, Alice Perez, former employee of the Gallup-McKinley Chamber of Commerce, and the more than 100 volunteers.

“The tutors really need to be thanked, for coming in every day, getting prepared, they all worked hard,” Romero said, adding that they are all appreciated greatly from the entire Stagecoach Elementary staff.

One of the volunteers, Linda Murphy, summed up the program in perfect words.

“Our goal is to have Kindergartner reading levels to the first grade by the time they start the first grade,” she said.

With the help of the chamber members, that got the idea from the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, and under the direction of Gallup McKinley County Schools, the volunteers paired up into groups of three.

Each took one day a week to read to two different Kindergartners for 30-minutes each. As the reading progressed, the tutors would also work on the alphabet, recognition of letters, reading and sight words as the student needed and as the teachers deemed necessary.

The tutors were able to tutor all 60 Kindergartner’s throughout the school year. Theu received the tutoring three days a week.

“Each kid gets one on one time three times a week,” Murphy said. “We really got to know the kids, which is nice.”

Romero said that not only did the program help increase reading levels, but it also opened up the lines of communication for the Kindergartners. Murphy and Romero both said that the progress that the students made from October to April was “amazing.” Another volunteer, Sandra McKinney, shared in their enthusiasm of the program.

“It’s a team effort, it’s been a wonderful program for these little kids,” McKinney said.

Not only did this group of individuals give of their time and talent to tutor these students, they also raised approximately $10,000 from the business community to fund the project.

This helped provide the materials as well as fingerprint and background check all of the volunteers. Murphy said that the business district was a wonderful support throughout the program from donating funds to allowing their employees time to be part of the program and tutor students.

“The only bad thing was that it cost $44 a person to get [the volunteers] fingerprinted,” she said.

With their limited budget, it was difficult spending money on the background checks instead of more materials for the students.

The group is already looking towards the 2015-2016 school year with the goal of first grade reading levels in mind.

“We could always use new tutors,” Murphy said.

Those interested in the program, for more information or to donate time or money can contact Linda Murphy at Murphy Builders (505) 863-6274 or the Gallup-McKinley Chamber of Commerce at (505) 722-2228.