



## FOREFRONTS 2011

Meet 13 people who are making Lake County a better place to live

SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE

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**WAUKEGAN**  
**On The Record With ... Barbara Martin**  
 As president and CEO of Vista Health System, Barbara Martin led the organization in launching a new program that aims to shorten emergency room wait times.  
 Reporter Colin Selbo has the inside scoop.  
**PAGE 3**

**LAKE VILLA**  
**Program to target extra pooch pounds**  
 Does your doggie look a little overweight? The Canine Center in Lake Villa can help. Its "Hefty Hounds" program is looking to get man's best friend in tip-top shape through diet and exercise.  
**PAGE 6**

**LAKE COUNTY**  
**Coroner pleads guilty to felony charges**  
 Lake County coroner Richard Keller has resigned after pleading guilty to two felony charges.  
 Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran will assume the duties of coroner until a replacement is named.  
**PAGE 7**

**MUNDELEIN**  
**Carmel gymnasts back-to-back champs**  
 Despite having a young squad, the Corsairs girls gymnastics team captured its second state title in a row. Several Carmel girls also placed individually.  
 Check out the Journal's photos from the event.  
**PAGE 24**

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# ForeFronts 2011



MEET **13** PEOPLE WHO ARE  
MAKING LAKE COUNTY  
A BETTER PLACE  
TO LIVE



# Bringing books to the rescue

## Executive director gets reading material into hands of children

By COLIN SELBO

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Brian Floriani wants your books.

He also wants your neighbor's books. And books from all your friends. Not to mention books from their friends, too.

Floriani wants all the books he can get his hands on. That's how he can give them to someone else. Someone who might not have any books to call his or her own.

Bernie's Book Bank has only existed for 15 months. But in its first year, it distributed approximately 140,000 books to under-privileged children in the Chicago area, including about 114,000 books to children in Lake County.

As remarkable as that total sounds – particularly for an organization in its first year of existence – it's only a fraction of the amount of books Floriani wants to get into the hands of young readers.

By 2013, Floriani hopes to see Bernie's Book Bank distributing one million children's books a year.

"My vision is very big," Floriani said while looking over large containers piled high with hundreds of donated books at the Libertyville warehouse where the book bank rents space. "In fact, when I see a UPS truck, I only imagine it's Bernie's Book Bank."

Bernie's Book Bank is named after Floriani's father, Bernard Floriani, a Delaware educator who worked to promote literacy and teach effective reading instruction. After the elder Floriani died in 2005, Brian Floriani and his siblings created the Bernard P. Floriani Foundation. That foundation evolved and eventually became Bernie's Book Bank in December 2009.

With Floriani at the helm, Bernie's Book Bank and its team of volunteers have achieved a firm grip on what it takes to quickly get do-

### Getting to know ... Brian Floriani

**Occupation:** Founder and executive director of Bernie's Book Bank

**Age:** 36

**Family:** Wife, Jillian; daughter, Zoë Read

**Village of residence:** Lake Forest

**Education:** University of Delaware

**Hobbies:** Trying to be the best husband and father he can be

nated books to children who need them.

Each book donated to the book bank is first placed with other books intended for children in a similar grade level. Those books are then bagged with five other books of different genres.

The idea is that each child will then be exposed to a variety of styles and subjects through the books he or she receives, Floriani said.

Volunteers also ensure that heavily worn books – or books that are "over-loved," in Floriani's words – are separated into different bags, and that books that are too heavily damaged are not included with regular distribution.

"The rule is, if it's not good enough for your child, your niece or nephew, your cousin, your son, your grandson, it isn't good enough for anybody else's," Floriani said.

The donated books are then brought to schools included in the book bank's distribution partnership list. Schools that are part of the partnership are ensured a visit from the book bank three times a year, generally before extended breaks and summer vacation. Every child at the school is given six books during every distribution event, meaning each receives 18 books throughout the year, Floriani said.

Part of what makes the book bank effective is that it focuses exclusively on collecting and distributing books. People have asked Flo-



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**Bernie's Book Bank volunteer Tina Diver (left) of Libertyville and Brian Floriani, executive director of the book bank, place donated books into bags at the book bank's Libertyville warehouse.**

riani what the book bank is doing to help students learn to read. But that's already being done – and being done well – by schools and literacy programs, he said.

What is lacking is the guarantee that those students have books to read when they get home, Floriani added.

"Hoping that that trip to the library happens in unacceptable," he said. "The answer is, show me where the children are. We're going to take [the books] right to them."

Lynn Tracy, community engagement manager at United Way of Lake County, said Bernie's Book Bank has been an asset to the organization. United Way used to collect and sort books for Lake County schools on its own, but now passes those duties directly to the book bank, Tracy said.



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**Brian Floriani sorts books at Bernie's Book Bank in Libertyville. To date, the book bank has distributed a total of 165,941 books.**

# Founder wants to distribute one million books a year



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**Brian Floriani, executive director of Bernie's Book Bank, holds books that will be distributed to underprivileged children.**

## Want to learn more?

For information on how to donate books to **Bernie's Book Bank**, visit [www.berniesbookbank.org](http://www.berniesbookbank.org) or call 847-780-7323.

### • FLORIANI Continued from page 4

Scout troops, corporate groups and other organizations looking to host book drives or donate books also are referred to Floriani, Tracy said.

"It really matched our needs," she said. "He's just throwing books all over the place."

Book bank volunteer Peg Smiley has been present on days when books are distributed to students. It's easy to see the thrill the children have when a bag full of books is handed over to them as their own, noting that Flo-

riani is always working to get more books to pass on to more children.

"He has a sense of mission to do something that can really make a difference," Smiley said. "He's got all the right energy and direction to make it work."

Floriani credits the more than 150 volunteers who give their time to all aspects of the book bank's operations for the impact the organization is having on children.

"You are only as successful as the people you surround yourself with," he said. "We've been very blessed with the people [we have]."

Floriani added he under-

stands why people can have difficulty giving up books that are filled with childhood memories. That's why he stresses the importance of using those books to create new memories for children who have never owned any books.

It's how he combats what he sees as an urgent need to get children with limited or no exposure to books excited about reading and the possibilities that come with a passion for literacy and learning.

"I don't buy [just] one book for my child," Floriani said. "When you get right down to it, that one book is great for a warm, fuzzy feeling for me."

"It's not going to really transform their life in any way. I feel like our program can literally change some lives."

# Basketball tournament next fundraiser for 12 Oaks Foundation

### • HUPPS Continued from page 5

"Amazingly, it all came together, as far as people opening up their hearts and understanding what it's all about," said Judi George, a friend of the Hupps and member of the Matt's Mile sponsorship committee. "Everybody has been affected by cancer. The fact that Julie and Steve have a mission to help families, that really struck a chord with a lot of businesses. At the end of the day, a lot of sponsorships came through."

The success of the fundraiser also was recognized by Diane Walkowiak, Julie Hupp's right-hand woman when it came to organizing Matt's Mile.

Walkowiak described the undertaking as the "family event of the year," noting that many people believed the Hupps would succeed in hosting an unforgettable run.

"You knew they were going to take all this energy that was given to them and turn it around and give it all right back," she said. "We just had this outpouring [of support]. It was incredible."

The Hupp's next big fundraiser is the Hoops for Hope tournament, which will take place Saturday, March 19, and Sunday, March 20, at

Grayslake North and Grayslake Central high schools, respectively.

Boys, girls and adults are welcome to sign up for the three-on-three event, Steve Hupp said.

"We thought this would be a nice spring event to complement the fall event," he said. "We can't raise a ton of money with this event, but it will help spread the word to the organizations we are trying to reach. I love basketball, and Julie loves running, so we thought these would be good things to divide up."

Family friend Mark Ruhlmann is helping organize Hoops for Hope. He said the idea behind the event and the 12 Oaks Foundation is one that many have found to be a win-win.

"When you think about it, it is a great situation for the organizations that are able to participate," he said. "This is a little but different - it's a chance to connect with a group that not only helps the organization, but also its participants."

The 12 Oaks Foundation is in a position to start helping families in need. Details about the organization, including sponsorship and volunteer opportunities, can be found at [www.12oaksfoundation.org](http://www.12oaksfoundation.org) or by calling 847-508-0351.

"People are proud, and it's hard sometimes to say, 'We would like funding,' when you're used to paying



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**Steve and Julie Hupp pet their dog, Tucker, with their children, Grant, 13, and Elyse, 10, at their home in Grayslake. The Hupps started the 12 Oaks Foundation in honor of their 13-year-old son, Matt, who died of cancer in 2009.**

for everything for your kids," Julie Hupp said. "We just want to make [this] comfortable ... tell us your story; show us there's a sickness, and we'll make an assessment."

"And part of [the whole foundation] is to make it fun," Steve Hupp

said. "The last thing Matt would want is for people to sit around being sad and just kind of moping. This is fun stuff that he'd like to be doing. They're community events - you'd be doing them whether they were fundraisers or not."