

Literacy foundation to help low-income families

By ANGELA D. SYKORA
asykora@pioneerlocal.com

As a child, Brian Floriani saw his father, a reading specialist, go off to work everyday not realizing the importance of his job or the profound impact his father's passion would have on him when he grew up.

Books held a certain fascination for Bernard P. Floriani. He loved to look at them, touch them and read them, lots of them.

"I feel the same way my father did," said Floriani, who established a non-profit foundation in his father's memory to give children from low-income families the literacy skills they need to keep up with their peers once they enter school.

The Bernard P. Floriani Foundation held two events in Gurnee this weekend, the "Links for Literacy Golf Classic" at Bittersweet Golf Course and a "Children's Chautauqua in the Park" at Viking Park, which promoted reading through a host of children's storytellers, authors and musicians. Students from Warren Township High School's Future Business Leaders of America served as volunteers.

"Our goal is to have events throughout the year" said Floriani, of Lake Forest.

The other goal is to further establish the foundation as a results-oriented program that can transform the socio-economic status of low-income families in one generation through early childhood literacy programs.

Floriani said the foundation seeks to partner with other non-profit organizations such as the United Way and the Boys and Girls Club of America to offer low-income families help in preparing their children for school.

The number of spoken words a child from a low-income family hears between the ages of 0 and 4 is 32 million less a child from a middle-income fam-

ily, said Floriani, a reading specialist at a school in Zion.

If a child begins school having never heard a particular word and cannot recognize it in print because it was never spoken to him, that child is already falling behind compared with his peers, said Floriani.

He believes there is a correlation between low-income households and children who struggle to read and comprehend.

"We are missing the boat here. If a child in kindergarten does not know the difference between a letter and a number, they will probably be behind in their reading and by third grade, might never catch up," said Floriani.

"They could grow up hating to read and never learn to be a gatherer of information."

After his father died of a massive heart attack at the age of 58 in Sept. 2005, Floriani said his life's mission became clear.

A former professional golfer, Floriani quit a lucrative job teaching at golf schools in W. Palm Beach and Lake Tahoe to become, like his father, a reading specialist for children from low-income families.

"I realized I felt so much for these kids. It's not like they were born with any different hardware than we were. They just didn't get enough attention before school started."

When the Bernard P. Floriani Foundation began in 2006, its mission was to raise funds for a different charity every year.

The first event raised \$25,000 for the Prader-Willi Research Foundation. Prader-Willi Syndrome or PWS, is a genetic disease widely recognized as the common genetic cause of childhood obesity.

The foundation's mission later changed to focus on children's literacy and reading.

It's a family affair with the extended Floriani fam-



ily working together.

This year's campaign is to raise \$15,000 and collect 5,000 books for distribution to schools in need.

Half of the proceeds raised by the foundation will benefit the National Education Association's Read Across America program.

To learn more or to make a donation, visit www.bernardpflorianifoundation.org.

Comment: pioneerlocal.com



ABOVE: Megan Wong, 9, creates bubbles during Sunday's festivities. (Photo By Joe Shuman/For STMG)

LEFT: Abby Sorsky, 1, gets her feet painted during the foundation activities Sunday at Viking Park. (Photo By Joe Shuman/For STMG)