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NEWS-SUN STAFF REPORT

WAUKEGAN -- Hundreds of Waukegan elementary students will enlarge their book collections, thanks to a donation from a Lake Forest-based literacy foundation and United Way of Lake County.

More than 11,000 new and gently used books will be donated next month to students at Lyon Magnet, Clearview, Glen Flora, Little Fort, Carman-Buckner and North schools.

The books, which will be donated in bundles of six to students in selected grade levels at each school, come courtesy of the Bernard P. Floriani Foundation, which is donating 40,000 books to students across the Chicago area in time for the holidays.

Brian Floriani, who started the charity in honor of his father, the former director of reading instruction for the State of Delaware, said he partnered with the United Way to distribute the books because he believes in the importance of children reading from a young age.

"Reading is the single most important skill that children can learn to be competent members of our society," Floriani said. "We like to consider ourselves like a blood bank. These books are the lifeblood of these children's future."

At Little Fort, where the books will be distributed to second- and third-graders, Principal Sharon Laviolette said she is ecstatic.

"I feel like we have hit the literacy lotto for our students. Once again, the United Way has created a link to placing literature into our children's hands. Mr. Floriani's generosity places books into 171 of our students' hands," she said.

Floriani's foundation collects books through book drives at local Barnes and Noble stores, and more than two dozen Starbucks locations on the North Shore. He can be reached at brian@bernardpflorianifoundation.org.