

Family Literacy Day gets helping hand

By Jeff Bell, Times Colonist January 24, 2010



Children look and choose books for upcoming Family Literacy Day, at Orca Books in Victoria, B.C. January 20, 2010. Bob Tyrrell (President and Editorial Director Orca Books) reads to eight year old Ethan Munro, from Colwood Elementary.

Photograph by: Adrian Lam, Times Colonist

What better combination to mark Family Literacy Day than an organization that promotes literacy skills and a leading publisher of children's books?

The non-profit Victoria READ Society and Orca Book Publishers have joined forces to mark the Wednesday event, a national day of awareness that stresses the value of reading and learning as a family. The collaboration began when Orca began looking for a group to present with the \$1,650 raised when it held a charity silent auction as part of its 25th-anniversary celebrations last fall.

The donated funds will go to the READ Society's Education Access Program, which helps low-income households afford instruction time. Orca, whose books are geared to children and teens, has also donated a collection of its titles to the READ Society.

READ Society teachers are excited at the prospect of having a selection of new books at their disposal.

"We came across the Victoria READ Society, and the only thing that surprises me is that we didn't get together with them sooner," said Bob Tyrrell, Orca president and editorial director.

The READ Society's focus on providing instruction in literacy and a range of basic academic skills fits well with Orca's aims, Tyrrell said.

"Literacy is a big part of our publishing program. We publish a lot of books that are aimed at readers reading below grade level, struggling readers."

On Family Literacy Day, the Read Society will display the books provided by Orca and also provide food and "literacy-themed" party favours at a series of celebrations from 2:30-6:30 p.m.

"We've set it up in our three different locations, and it's just a way to connect with the parents and the kids," said READ Society executive director Claire Rettie. "This exposes them to some of the newer literature they might not have seen."

The books from Orca are ranked by their reading levels, so children can find something that suits them, Rettie said.

"This gives them context and something that they're actually able to tackle on their own."

The Read Society is located at #201-2631 Quadra St., in the West Shore Child, Youth and Family Centre at 345 Wale Rd. and in Sidney at #302B-9775 4th St.

Both Rettie and Tyrrell expect this year's venture to develop into a long-term relationship that helps advance literacy in the community.