

# Farewell First Teachers

## Project again belongs to the community.

By Brooke Lopez

Imagine a world where letters are just letters, not words, or where books are just pages and this *Piper* is more frustrating than informative. To the illiterate this is the case. Job applications, menus, street signs and maps are all road blocks instead of tools. Over the past six years, our League has worked to ensure children get a head start to being readers through the First Teachers project, partnered with the Bring Me a Book Foundation. Reading aloud to children

Nearly 100 League members have served on the First Teachers Committee. In six years, we have distributed over 1,600 books and educated over 1,500 parents and caregivers on the importance of reading aloud to children.

beginning at birth has been proven over and over again to increase their cognition of words, and their ability to read when they become school aged. Essentially, a parent or primary caregiver are a child's first teachers and they may not even realize the impact their actions can have. Almost 100 League members have served on the First Teachers Committee in its tenure with the League leading classes to teach parents of young children about the importance of reading aloud every day.

Personally, this program was eye opening for me. I understood that reading to my kids would be important but I didn't understand the simple brain development that is impacted by hearing words read in structured sentences and stories. As a child's brain develops, it is building pathways of data associating things he or she sees with meaning. As these pathways are reinforced with repetition they become permanent knowledge. My 3-month old son, started reaching out and touching his toys recently. I knew instinctively he would reach out, the toy would make a sound and over a bit of time he would associate the sound with the action of his hand. The same thing happens with the brain when hearing someone read, and their brains will not be strangers to words when they enter school.

As we say farewell to the First Teachers project and take on a brand new challenge, as the League so awesomely does, let's look at some

*(continued)*



First Teachers Committees 2004 to present. BOTTOM RIGHT: Current committee members enjoy a fun evening at a soap-making social at Opal'z in Palo Alto. RIGHT (L to R): Kathy Pendleton, Jean Elliot and Chris Sapyta.

## Mpower!

### Working the Meal, the Message and the Model.

By: Cathy Lewis

**W**e are half way through our second year of Mpower, the social skills curriculum developed with the Fostering Families Committee, and what a year it has been! We have a new group of kids, and some repeats from last year who loved it so much, they are back for more!

The same goes for the Junior League; this is an amazing group of women under the leadership of **Kyla Eller** and **Mary Morey**. Some Fostering Families Committee members returned for a second year of working with these special kids, and others from our first year continue to volunteer.

The quality of women on this committee continues to impress us all! They bring with them a true sense of commitment to the higher calling of what it takes to be successful in working with foster children, and those that carry the burden of attachment disorder and the corresponding social difficulties.

We have developed a social skills curriculum, but the execution of the session lies in the unique abilities of the women committed to Fostering Families. I can organize materials and coach the leaders, but that only goes so far. They each contribute the fullness of who they are and bring the program to life! They truly model what it means to Mpower another person, each other, and the children they serve. It has been a privilege to work with the Junior League and we look forward with appreciation to making Mpower the best it can be.

*Cathy Lewis is the Program Manager for Help One Child. ♦*

---

*(First Teachers, continued)*

numbers. Over 100 League members have served on this project which means over 100 women in our community have the knowledge to teach other about the importance of reading aloud. Our League is a training organization at its core and these past committee members are out there with that gift of knowledge to share regardless of committee placement. These incredible women have taught 1,586 parents that they are their child's first teacher and have given to these families 1,655 books. Now, imagine a world where every parent has a beautiful book to sit down and read to their children each day.

Thank you to all First Teachers committee members, all First Teachers Chairs and Co-Chairs, the past six Community VPs who supported those leaders and most of all, Judy Koch, founder of Bring Me a Book and her amazing staff. As the League steps away from our partnership, Bring me a Book has big plans to continue training and begin more read-aloud programs in the area. If you are interested in joining their efforts in the future check out their website at [www.bringmeabook.org](http://www.bringmeabook.org) and contact them through the "Contact Us" page. ♦

## Volunteer

### Done in a Day CALENDAR

#### MARCH BUNDLES FOR BABIES DRIVE

Through March 31, bring in diapers and other toiletry essentials for babies living at homeless shelters. Drop off at the General Membership Meeting or bin at the Gatehouse. Donations will benefit mothers and babies at Shelter Network shelters.

#### FOSTERING FAMILIES

**Monday, March 7, April 11 or May 9**  
4:30 and 5 p.m.

Get DIAD credit for being a table assistant for Fostering Families! Help the children follow the curriculum, assist with art projects, help with group discussions and serve/clear the dinner.

#### HIDDEN VILLA SHEEP SHEARING

**Sunday, March 20**

9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. | Los Altos

Staff event to promote environmental and social justice issues. Two shifts available.

#### COLLECTIVE ROOTS GARDENING

**Saturday, April 16**

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. | East Palo Alto

Weed, dig, and plant a garden that helps educate youth on sustainable food systems.

#### REBUILDING TOGETHER

**Saturday, April 30**

8:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon Rehabilitate a home or community center for low income families or the elderly. Two shifts available.