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OU professor serves as scholar for literacy program

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

Through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Saginaw Public Library is offering a workshop for low-literacy families called "Prime Time Family Reading Time," which includes reading, discussion and storytelling. Twenty-five families, which are being recruited through many community organizations, will receive dinner and even transportation to the library to make sure they can participate. Associate Professor of Education Gwendolyn McMillon is serving as a scholar for the program helping to facilitate book discussions each week. The program hits home for McMillon, who frequented the library when she was growing up in the area.

The \$60,000 grant was awarded to 19 libraries nationwide, including five Michigan libraries, two of which are in Saginaw. Children in the fourth through eighth grade and their families, including their parents, grandparents, siblings and whoever else is integral to their family environment, are invited to apply to the program. A library community outreach employee will be checking in with the families prior to and after the program to determine their needs and also the impact it had on them.

"I'm very committed to family literacy. Most of my research is about making the connection between home and school and also studying the church, school and home connections," McMillon said. She was asked by the library to serve as scholar for the program. McMillon has facilitated a kindergarten workshop at the library for the past five years, she has worked in the local schools and her husband is a pastor at the local church so she said she feels invested in the area.

In order to prepare for "Prime Time Family Reading Time," McMillon and other program volunteers attended training in New Orleans, La. They were able to learn how other libraries are approaching the program and develop ways to reach their target audience.

Each week, families will be given a meal before a storyteller reads the week's book to them. After the story, McMillon will ask the group questions to help get them thinking about the message.

"I will ask open-ended questions to go deeper than the superficial level of the book," McMillon said. "I want them to make connections between the book and themselves, to other books, movies and even current events."

Each family will be given the following week's book to take home and read and prepare for that discussion.

"We are providing the vocabulary for parents to learn how to talk to their children about books," McMillon said.

The families will also get library cards. McMillon explained that many low-literacy families don't know library cards are free and that they can check out books at no-cost.

"These are the children who are falling through the cracks. If we can get the mom, dad, grandparents, older siblings involved then we hope to create a positive environment for the students," McMillon said.

SUMMARY

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