

ralbanorisso@mantecabulletin.com
209-249-3536

MAKING BOOK

Students pour hearts into project

LATHROP – The handful of parents and grandparents who showed up Tuesday morning at Lathrop Elementary School knew they were attending a book party. But the big surprise came later on when they actually got to read what their children had written in the newly minted hardcover publication titled, “Warriors Rock!” with the subtitle, “Lathrop Elementary School Warrior Writers.”

“Wow! She told just me, ‘Mama, look at my story!’” said a very excited Ceci Perez as she eagerly read the story written by her daughter, third grader Jessica Barriga.

Equally impressed and looking overwhelmed as she looked at Jessica with open admiration and pride was her grandmother, Juanita Perez.

“She reads every day, and she writes a letter to me every day. I have a stack of them,” said Ceci Perez of her daughter, almost breathless in her excitement.

The book party celebrating the publication of the anthology book featuring the creative writing efforts of nearly 200 Lathrop School students was held in the school gym with Manteca Unified School District Superintendent Jason Messer among the special guests. During the hour-long program, a few of the students were called upon by Principal David Silveira to read their prose or poetry pieces in the book.

In recognition of their accomplishment, the young novice writers and newly minted published authors were treated to a nutritious buffet consisting of fresh fruits, cookies, and juice for drinks.

The writers were students of teachers Kristina Hoffman (preschool), Cecilia Martinez (first and second grade combination), Deborah Farrell (second and third grade combination), Norma Molina (third grade), Shannon Culvahouse (third grade), Genevieve Beltran (third grade), and Martha Salcedo (seventh and eighth grades).

A few of the entries were written by students of Lathrop teachers who are involved in the Great Valley Writing Project.

The book was published gratis by Canada-based Friesens Publishing Company through Fred Perrin, the company’s manager. Beltran, who is the author of three books that are yet to be published, said Perrin offered to print the children’s book free of charge and simply donated 190 copies to the students. All 128 pages of the book, which is similar to the size of a yearbook, are glossy for extra durability. The binding also is of durable quality.

Beltran said a copy of the book will be kept in the school library. She also hinted at a second book project in the next school year.

The students' writings in the book range from funny to impossibly ridiculous to insightful. Jessica Barriga's story, for example, about a poodle that was brought home one day by her mother and grandfather is quite heart-tugging. Jessica, who aspires to be a veterinarian someday, was ecstatic about owning the dog. But after her family had built the dog a house, they learned that the dog actually belonged "to a lady who was moving to Mexico." But her story has a happy ending although she "cried a lot because he felt like mine." She now has a new dog.

In the same emotional mold, albeit one of a more mature nature dealing with such issues as domestic abuse and dysfunctional families, is 11-year-old Shelbi Torres's "The Life a Child Should Never Have."

In an upbeat note, 13-year-old Jonnatan Montes's review of the book, "Wall of Fame," by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jonathan Freedman is a piece that encourages one to pick up a copy of the tome which chronicles the history of the A.V.I.D. (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program and how it can influence young people to succeed.

"This great book has shown us that if you make an effort on anything, any goal can be accomplished.... I appreciate this book because it shows people believing in students of every background and challenging them to reach their full potential," Jonnatan concluded.

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