



Brien Niell and Tucker, a 7-year-old Brittany spaniel, listen to Emaline Reeves, a second-grader at Chimacum Creek Primary School, as she reads her favorite "Bad Kitty" book as part of the Read to Rover program Nov. 9. Leader photo by Kirk Boxleitner

Chimacum 2nd-graders 'Read to Rover'

Program aims to build literacy, confidence

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When Emaline Reeves heard that Tucker, the Brittany spaniel she was reading to, is 7 years old, she said, "Hey, I'm 7 years old, too!"

Reeves read one of the books in the "Bad Kitty" series to Tucker, since she finds the books "very funny," and thought Tucker would appreciate them.

All the dogs in the library at Chimacum Creek Primary School on Nov. 9 were attentive listeners, as the school's second-graders read aloud to them from their own favorite books as part of the Read to Rover program.

Quinn Brinton also is a fan of the "Bad Kitty" series and read "Bad Kitty Goes to the Vet" to Julio Jalapeño, a 5-year-old Havanese-poodle crossbreed, because he thought the dog could relate to visiting the veterinarian.

Kim Pratt, who retired

last year, has been working with Read to Rover locally for the past decade, but she was involved with Chimacum Creek Primary for even longer, having served as the school's speech pathologist for 17 years.

"Even after I retired, this program was too tough to give up," Pratt said. "The first four years we did it here, it was a remedial reading supplement, so it was only available to 16 kids, but that seemed unfair."

Ever since, all of Chimacum Creek's second-grade students have taken part in Read to Rover, which expanded last year to include a number of first-graders, whenever any of the second-graders are absent.

"We've done about three to four classrooms a year, ranging between 18 to 22 students each, so that gives you an idea of how many students we've served over the years," said Pratt, who noted a new class of second-graders cycled into

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Kim Pratt
READ TO ROVER

the library every 15 minutes Nov. 9.

Pratt touted the language and literacy benefits of having kids read aloud, from developing their phonics skills by sounding out words, to understanding written content and vocabulary.

"The cherry on top is the relationships," she added, pointing out that each dog comes with an adult handler.



Otis, a 9-year-old crossbreed of an Australian shepherd and a Great Pyrenees, joins Shirley Williams of the Read to Rover program as an audience for Chimacum Creek Primary second-grader Carson Boltinghouse as he reads "Fly Guy Presents: The White House" on Nov. 9. Leader photo by Kirk Boxleitner

"These kids get to explore stories through telling and retelling them, without feeling any judgment."

Pratt credited Olympic Mountain Pet Pals with serving as an umbrella for Read to Rover, which also serves students in the Port Townsend and Quilcene school districts. She emphasized that a number of Chimacum Creek staff members have helped inaugurate and continue the program throughout the years, including Chris Parsons, who works at the school library,

and whom Pratt estimated had worked at the school even more years than herself.

"Even as the original dogs have passed on, new dogs have been brought in," Pratt said. "For our accelerated readers, it's a chance for additional practice, and for our remedial readers, it's a chance to enjoy reading without judgment, with plenty of tender-loving care."

All the dogs are trained, tested and certified to ensure they're an appropriate fit for the kids, and Pratt said

Olympic Mountain Pet Pals has never received word of an incident with the dogs.

Both the students and the dogs handlers have been issued red Read to Rover T-shirts, with the adults paying for their own, and the kids' shirts provided for free thanks to community donations.

"Every year, it's a rite of passage now," Pratt said. "The first-graders see the Read to Rover groups in the library, and they can't wait until they're in second grade."



Jane Ahl and Julio Jalapeño, a 5-year-old Havanese-poodle crossbreed, follow along with Chimacum Creek

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