

Kids in poorer-area schools will get help with books

By SANDY STRICKLAND, Staff writer

Betty Metz is convinced that books can change a child's life. But there are thousands of children in the area whose families cannot afford to buy books for them.

Metz wants to change that.

She is coordinating an areawide drive, called Books-A-Go Go, to get donations of new and used books to give to elementary and middle schools serving needy children.

The books can be dropped off this month at four area DriveTime dealerships - 10384 Atlantic Blvd. near Regency Mall, 220 Blanding Blvd. in Orange Park, 1831 Cassat Ave. on the Westside and 10733 Philips Highway near The Avenues mall.

In addition, owner Anna Shon will mark the grand opening of Bella Candles and Gifts in the Orange Park Mall by giving a free soy candle and coupons to anyone donating a book through Sunday, Metz said.

Rally Jacksonville, Mayor John Peyton's early literacy initiative, is partnering with Books-A-Go Go and will pass along any book donated at a Jacksonville public library in March, she said.

In Duval County alone, Metz said, there are 54 elementary schools and five middle schools with 62 percent of their students on free or reduced lunch.

"These children face such challenges," she said. "They need to dream. They may read a book on building a bridge, for example, and want to become an engineer."

Metz said other children can help them fulfill their dreams by cleaning off their shelves and passing along books they have outgrown.

University of North Florida students who intern at urban professional development schools will collect, sort and distribute the books.

Metz said businesses, organizations, churches and schools are welcome to launch their own drives. Informational kits are available.

DriveTime, which specializes in selling used cars to people with credit problems, is a business partner with West Jacksonville, where Metz heads the School Advisory Council and has been volunteering for eight years.

Monetary donations to Books-A-Go Go can be made at any Synovus Bank or drop-off location. Books dropped off in Clay or St. Johns counties will go to children in those districts. For more information, call Metz at 292-4633.

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