

# Students' project helps others learn to read

JUPITER — You probably aren't giving a second thought to reading these words.

For most of you, it's not a problem. More than likely, you got your start reading at home with mom and dad and did fine once you started going to school.

But there are kids who aren't getting an early start. They don't have books at home. Or mom



Joe Bonikowski

and dad can't read English.

Until about eight years ago, those kids didn't have a lot of options. In 2000, two kids from Jupiter decided to help give other kids a reading, writing

and learning chance. Sam and Faren Silverman started Children's Books on Tape, Inc., to help others improve their educational foundation.

"My mom was taking a teacher education course (at Florida Atlantic University) and was substitute teaching," said Sam, now a sophomore at Yale University. "The students were deficient in their reading skills."

At the time, "we were taking long car rides and listening to books on tape."

CBOT had a meager, but enthusiastic, beginning.

"We went to libraries and some donated books," Sam said. "We went to garage sales and picked up books for 25 cents."

There wasn't a lot of help at the start.

"It was just us for the first

three years," said Faren, a junior at Jupiter High School.

They'd get a children's book, for kindergarten through fourth-grade reading level, and narrate the book into an audio tape. Voice prompts on the tape let the kids know when to turn the page.

The kids at Warfield Elementary School in Indiantown were the first recipients of Sam and Faren's efforts.

"They started with us back in 2001," said Loreen Francesceni, Warfield's principal. "Sam started recording books on tape and having friends record books over the years."

Francesceni said her school has a diverse student body. Approximately 97 percent of students are at poverty level or below and 70 percent of the student body is learning English as a second language.

"One of the things that's so important for students at our school is that our children benefit tremendously from hearing stories read in English, and from having stories read in sequence that matches the pictures," Francesceni said. "We encourage every child to read every night. It's also critical for them to be read to. ... This is a wonderful way to provide those children a personal reader."

Now those personal readers come from several schools, including Florida Atlantic University, Jupiter High School, and Jensen Beach High School.

FAU professor Deborah Harris, who's in the College of Education and is based at the Jupiter

## Children's Books On Tape Inc.

Narrators are needed to put books on audio tapes. Donations of children's books or money to buy books, tapes and players are needed. Call (561) 575-7773 or e-mail CBOT2001@aol.com

campus, has been participating with her students for about four years. Students from the Boca Raton, Davie and St. Lucie campuses also are involved.

"All teachers need to know how to read to their kids, and it's not as easy as it seems," Harris said. "This project gives them a chance to practice doing that. Then they've done something for a good cause and learned some skills."

Each tape is about 20 minutes long and the narrators get one hour of community service for each book turned in. They have the advantage of doing their narration on their own time, at their own pace and in their own place.

"The readers can donate their voices," Faren said. "It's an easy way to get community service. That's why a lot of kids at my school do this."

"They record the books, I do the quality control (listening to each tape and makes sure the words and prompts match up) then I package the books with instructions. All tapes are originals. We don't make any copies. Every one is unique."

Since Children's Books on



Sam and Faren Silverman of Children's Books on Tape, package kids books and a corresponding audio tape into specially designed plastic bags. 'Listening Libraries' of 50 books are hung on spinning racks (rear) and donated to area elementary schools.

Photo by JOE BONIKOWSKI

Tape began, approximately 1,500 books and corresponding tapes have been donated to elementary schools in Palm Beach County (including Eisenhower, Grove Park and Jupiter) and Martin County (including Warfield and Port Salerno).

Financial support has grown slowly. Wachovia Bank was the first contributor to jump in, donating 1,000 books and \$500 in 2003. Recent donations, which will help buy books and tape players, have come from the Kanter Foundation of Stuart and Anchor Commercial Bank in Palm Beach Gardens.

"Every penny that comes in

goes back out," Faren said.

With those donations, and more volunteers, Sam and Faren hope to see the project grow.

"I think one of the next steps I'd like to see happen," Sam said, "is approaching the Palm Beach County school board and having this be one of their community service venues — older students helping younger students in their own community."

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