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With appreciation to our sponsors:

Presented by
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CORPORATE SPOTLIGHT: AT&T

Focusing on school success and community leadership are two hallmarks of AT&T’s corporate philanthropy. AT&T is ensures that students who are at risk of dropping out of high school instead graduate and are prepared for college and career through its signature education initiative, AT&T Aspire.

While this specific initiative focuses on high school students, AT&T local and national leadership recognize the importance the third-grade reading benchmark plays in academic success. In addition, supporting a community where volunteers become leaders and vice versa underlies the very corporate culture that AT&T aspires to. For these reasons, AT&T has made a $25,000 investment in children and volunteers participating in SMART during the 2015-16 school year.

“AT&T is proud to be a partner with SMART because we believe strongly in supporting a community that recognizes children’s literacy as the most important stepping stone in a child’s academic career,” says George Granger, president, AT&T Oregon External Affairs. “We also recognize SMART’s commitment to providing opportunities for volunteerism across the state, and for creating leadership opportunities for those who want to give back to their community.”

2016 SMART GALA RAISES FUNDS FOR PROGRAMS STATEWIDE

SMART’s 2016 Gala, held on March 10 at the Moda Center in Portland, raised over $500,000 to support programs across Oregon. Thank you to our Board of Directors, generous sponsors, and the nearly 500 guests who joined us to celebrate and support the power of giving kids the gift of literacy.

With appreciation to our sponsors:

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Greetings, SMART Friends:

All across Oregon, our staff and volunteers have wrapped up SMART programs for the summer, bringing our 24th year of service to a close. The end of the SMART program year always brings a moment of personal reflection for me when the time comes to say goodbye to the two students I’ve spent the year getting to know over countless stories and laughs. And, while there’s some sadness at saying goodbye, there’s also a sense of wonder and satisfaction at the progress and development I’ve witnessed in them throughout the year. I know my fellow 5,000 SMART Readers can relate to this bittersweet experience.

Not only has the 2015-16 school year been a great one for our volunteers and students - it’s also been an important year organizationally for SMART. First, we served 10,101 PreK through third-grade students, and it’s the first time in nearly a decade that we’ve surpassed the 10,000 mark. This is a tremendous feat, and it’s made possible, in part, due to the support and partnership of thousands of Oregonians donating time and treasure to our work.

Additionally, we made solid progress on our two major initiatives focused on Program Quality and Equity, which you’ll also read more about in this edition. Last but far from least, we’ve been preparing for the celebration of our 25th anniversary next year. You’ll read more about our plans for commemorating this special milestone in this newsletter, and I hope you’ll join us in this statewide celebration.

I’m inspired by how far SMART has come, and excited about where we’re headed. Thanks to a dedicated statewide staff and Board of Directors, we continue our steadfast focus on providing children in our program with experiences that are positive and validating, build their self-confidence, and boost their reading skills, motivation and enjoyment.

I extend to you my heartfelt appreciation for your support of our work. Best wishes for a wonderful summer filled with sunshine on your faces and a good book in your hands!

Chris Otis
SMART Executive Director

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- WHERE ARE THEY NOW: ILIANA TOVAR -

ILIANA TOVAR was in SMART as a first grader in Portland. With her mom working two jobs to support Ilia and her three siblings, getting to the library and reading at home wasn’t something they had time for. While she wasn’t behind in reading, English was Ilia’s second language, and she viewed reading as a chore. She was quiet and shy, and wasn’t comfortable reading aloud in front of her classmates.

Ilia attended college at Portland State University, and now works for Meyer Memorial Trust in Portland.

Were you in the SMART program as a child? We want to hear from you! Email SMART@getSMARToregon.org to share your story.

- CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SMART -

SMART has spent the last 24 years bringing a love of reading and learning to Oregon kids, thanks to countless volunteers, donors, educators and supporters. We're celebrating our 25th anniversary during the 2016-17 school year with a campaign called Oregon Reads Aloud – a tribute to our life’s work empowering Oregon children for success.

Oregon Reads Aloud is also the title of our very own children’s book, a collection of 25 stories, written and illustrated by local authors and illustrators. Published by Graphic Arts, the book will be available for purchase in October.

To learn more about SMART’s 25th anniversary, visit getSMARToregon.org/25years.

Ilia credits SMART with building her self-confidence, and teaching her that discussing a book after reading could be interesting and enjoyable. The books she received in the SMART program were particularly special to her – and her family has kept the books all these years. In fact, Ilia’s brothers and sisters have started reading the books to their children.

- PROGRAM QUALITY INITIATIVE: YEAR 1 UPDATE -

One year after launching our Program Quality Initiative, we’ve taken important steps to better meet the needs of all SMART stakeholders. While SMART has always been about cultivating a love of reading, this initiative has given us the opportunity to further research and refine that focus. Based on our findings, we streamlined our focus on increasing reading engagement and motivation for our students, and identified key areas for improvement in our program, including:

- Book Selection: We’re expanding our collection of diverse titles so that all students have access to books that mirror their own cultural identities and experiences, and provide windows into other cultures.
- Training: In partnership with Education Northwest, we’re engaged in a rigorous review and revision of our volunteer training process. We will pilot a new training system this winter, and it will launch our new trainings statewide in 2017.
- Process Improvement: With the help of a Social Venture Partners Encore Fellow, we are streamlining internal processes and data collection in order to enhance our volunteer experience and improve service.

SMART HONORS OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS

SMART recognizes a Volunteer of the Year in each of our 10 areas across Oregon. Selected by their local offices from an annual pool of nominations, these folks truly represent the best of the best:

- Central Area: Aileen DeLapp
- Douglas Area: Juantia Saul and Betty Wittrock
- Metro Area: Brenda Derville
- Northeast Area: Pete Wells
- Northwest Area: Melanie Labhart
- North Coast Area: Jan Matthews
- Rogue Valley Area: Ellen Wakefield
- South Central Area: Bernie Wood
- South Coast Area: Carla Hedgepeth
- South Valley Area: Bob Bernhard

Pete Wells, a Site Coordinator at the Pendleton Early Learning Center, received the statewide title of Outstanding Volunteer.

Thank you to these individuals, and to our thousands of volunteers across Oregon, for giving their time and talents to SMART in order to change the lives of children statewide!

- EQUITY INITIATIVE -

Why Equity is Important to SMART

SMART was established to improve reading outcomes for Oregon kids, helping them develop literacy skills, self-confidence, and a love of reading. Literacy creates opportunities and choices for children; a lack of reading skills limits those opportunities and choices.

As an early literacy program focused on helping children succeed with reading and learning, we acknowledge that we need to keep racial, cultural, social, and economic inequities in our country and state make it harder for some children to succeed compared to others. We have launched our Equity Initiative to address the fact that children need different inputs to reach the same outcome – in our case, meeting or exceeding the third-grade reading benchmark.

Research proves that the education gap between white students and students of color arises for a number of reasons. The children we serve are from many different backgrounds, some of which create advantages or disadvantages in the education system. Our country, state, and society also perpetuate systemic, institutional, and cultural biases that reinforce inequality. These inequities and inequalities stand in the way of succeeding at our mission.

SMART’s Commitment to Equity

Together with our network of 5,000 volunteers reading with 10,000 students each year, we have an opportunity to change the story when it comes to the education gap in Oregon. We have a responsibility to better understand and serve the children in our programs and to examine how our organization, systems, and policies for bias and inequities. Issues of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, ability, geography, age, and other forms of bias must be identified and addressed in every aspect of our business. We expect equity to be prioritized in every facet of our organization, impacting:

- The children and families we serve
- The volunteers we recruit, train, and retain
- The communities in which we serve and operate

We began our Equity Initiative with an intentional focus on racial equity because inequities of a racial nature rise to the highest level of severity and negative impact on the educational outcomes of the students we serve. While we begin with racial equity as our guiding framework, we also will keep sight of other inequities and discrimination that exist for our children.

We acknowledge that this is a long and complex journey for any organization; we are committed to continual assessment and modification of our work.

To learn more about SMART’s commitment to equity, visit www.getSMARToregon.org/equity.

The volunteers we recruit, train, and retain
- The staff we hire, train, and support
- The communities in which we serve and operate

We must ensure equity before we can enjoy equality

The communities in which we serve
- The staff we hire, train, and support
- The volunteers we recruit, train, and retain
- The communities in which we serve and operate

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