

R.E. Davis opens Ben Carson Reading Room

Posted Saturday, September 3, 2016 6:00 am

BY KONSTANTIN VENGEROWSKY
KONSTANTIN@THEITEM.COM (MAILTO:KONSTANTIN@THEITEM.COM)

R.E. Davis Elementary School became the second school in the state to open a Ben Carson Reading Room on Friday.

Candy Carson, wife of former Republican presidential candidate and neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson, was at the school for the grand opening celebration and ribbon-cutting ceremony of the room. In 1994, the Carsons co-founded the Carson Scholars Fund, which gave scholarships to students in grades 4–11 for "academic excellence and humanitarian qualities." The Reading Rooms were developed by the fund in 2000.

The rooms are funded through assistance from local donors, such as individuals, businesses, civic organizations and foundations.

The project at R.E. Davis is being funded through a \$16,000 donation made by Thompson Companies.

"Today is about celebrating our children," said Greg Thompson, president and CEO of Thompson Companies. "We couldn't think of a better way to invest our resources than into the children of Sumter. We want them to have all of the opportunities they can to be successful."

Thompson said he saw a reading room in North Carolina and thought it would be a benefit to children in Sumter.

"The Thompson Companies are extremely proud to sponsor this room knowing that fostering the love of reading can provide advantages to the youth of our community for their whole life," Thompson said.

Today, there are more than 155 Ben Carson Reading Rooms in schools in 20 states across the nation, Candy Carson said.

R.E. Davis' colorful reading room contains more than 1,000 books, ranging from pre-kindergarten to fifth-grade reading levels. The room also contains bean bags and other comfortable chairs for students to sit on, book shelves and benches built by maintenance staff, and even a Dr. Seuss chair, built by one of the school's teachers. The reading room is decorated with artwork reinforcing Dr. Carson's "THINK BIG" philosophy of academic achievement and dedication to helping others.

"I thought the reading room at R.E. Davis was absolutely gorgeous," Candy Carson said after the opening ceremony. "It will inspire so many children and give them something positive to look forward to."

Carson said that when the Carson Scholars Fund puts a reading room in a school, it serves as a reward for the children.

“At first they read for the prizes that come with the room,” she said. “After a while though they learn to love learning. We’ve seen it time and time again; the students’ reading becomes better, their comprehension levels go up, and there are many other benefits.”

The Ben Carson Reading Project is designed to combat illiteracy and to promote leisure reading as a key to unlocking a child’s full potential, according to the website, www.carsonscholars.org. (<http://www.carsonscholars.org>.)

R.E. Davis was selected for the room out of seven elementary schools in the district that applied for it.

The school had to appoint an employee to be responsible for overseeing the construction of the room and its day-to-day operations as well as being in weekly contact with the liaison with the Carson Scholars Fund.

Heather Clemmons, former reading coach at the school, wrote the application grant for the project.

“I saw this as a great opportunity for our students and this community,” Clemmons said. “I wanted a place for children to read outside the four walls of a classroom or the library. For students to see that reading can be fun.”

Computers and other electronic devices are prohibited in the room, she said.

Michelle Curry-McBride, school principal, said as many as 30 students can be reading at the room at one time. Each of the school’s classes will use the room on a weekly basis.

Last year, students across the nation logged more than 15 million minutes of independent reading in the Ben Carson Reading Rooms, according to www.carsonscholars.org. (<http://www.carsonscholars.org>.)