

Volume XIX Issue III

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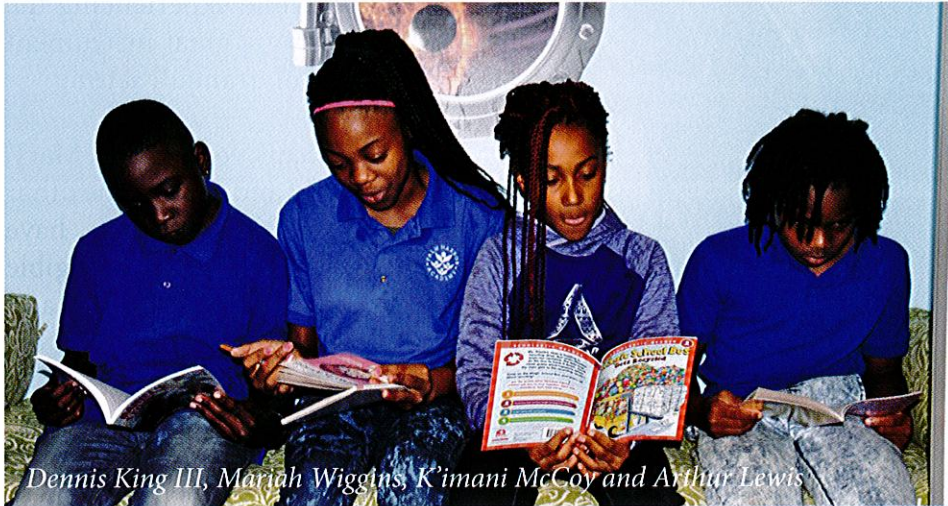


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# THINK BIG!

## Ben Carson Reading Room Established

by Candy Carson



Dennis King III, Mariah Wiggins, K'imani McCoy and Arthur Lewis

Public charter school Palm Harbor Academy has the distinction of becoming the first school in Flagler County to establish a Ben Carson Reading Room. The 12th in Florida, these rooms are whimsically decorated with kid-friendly seating and loaded with high-interest books for the sole purpose of encouraging youth to increase their reading capabilities. The room was made possible through the generosity of United Way of Volusia-Flagler counties, Jennifer McDonald, Karen Welden and Seminole Feed.

Ben Carson Reading Rooms are created by the Carson Scholars Fund, which was founded by retired, world-renowned pediatric neurosurgeon and *New York Times* bestselling author Dr. Ben Carson and his wife, Candy. The purpose of the Ben Carson Reading Project, an initiative of the Carson Scholars Fund, is to create a literacy-enriched environment for children to develop their reading skills in. The project is dedicated to promoting reading as a key to unlocking a child's full

potential. To date, the Carson Scholars Fund has established over 165 reading rooms in 22 states and Washington, D.C.

The program was held in the sanctuary of the First AME Church of Palm Coast with a capacity crowd. Principal Taylor Croot led off, and Rev. Gillard Glover introduced visiting community leaders and guests. Students were featured in several ways, including the Pledge of Allegiance, a THINK BIG presentation, a creative song about reading (to the tune of Pharrell's "Happy") and lone **second grader** K'imani McCoy singing the National Anthem!



Jennifer McDonald, Candy Carson and Dr. Betty Despenza-Green

This project was primarily due to the vision and hard work of Carson Scholars Fund board member Jennifer McDonald. Her vision was caught by Dr. Betty Despenza-Green, a member of the school board, who emceed the program.

Guest speaker Candy Carson related several amazing facts about the brain. She shared a story about one of her husband's patients, who after having half of her brain surgically removed, still was able to rise to the top of her math class by studying hard... and with only half of a brain!

Dr. Ben Carson, via video, spoke of his job as a neurosurgeon and explained why the Carson Scholars Fund was started. He used his own experience of going from the dumbest kid in the class to the top of the class by listening to his mother and reading books as an example of how they could achieve success. "The person who has the most to do with what happens to you, is you! You make the choice! If you don't understand something, ask until you find someone who can help you. Or read until you find the answer!" He closed with, "Read actively... and always THINK BIG!"

This room is uniquely filled with cubbyholes and bench seats, just perfect for students to climb in and cozy up with a friendly book. Sides of bookcases were painted like rockets blasting into space. There was no confining ceiling; instead, there was a sky painted with asteroids, other planets and stars representing limitless possibilities for high-flying thoughts and dreams!