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Included below is a press release regarding the grass-roots efforts of Diane Griffin to encourage children in Mecosta County to read. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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Griffin aims to prove reading is fundamental in Mecosta County

BIG RAPIDS – Last summer, Diane Griffin discovered that inspiration sometimes occurs when least expected.

Griffin, working at Ferris State University through grant money from the Michigan Campus Compact along with grants from the state and federal governments, had her face-to-face inspirational encounter during the hot summer months in Big Rapids as she worked with low-income kids in the city. As part of the AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America), Griffin has been engaged on a grass-roots level with her volunteer work to encourage reading and has enjoyed the opportunity to continue that at Ferris.

“My inspiration started for this program this past summer, when I was doing a summertime reading program over at the Big Rapids Housing Complex. It is for low income families. I would search the Internet to find ways to show the kids reading could be fun,” said Griffin, who is hopeful her efforts will have even more traction in the weeks to come with the program “March is Reading Month.” I came across the Web site ‘Get Caught Reading’ and thought it was great. But I wanted it to be more personal and specific to the people involved. I wrote to the publisher, Tina Jordan, who owns the rights to the ‘Get Caught Reading’ logo. She gave me permission to use it for my project.”

This Griffin-led project, “Get Caught Reading in Mecosta County,” is a collaborative local effort that includes assistance from the Big Rapids Community Library as well as from the Ferris FLITE Media Production. The inspiration of the young people she met last summer, in Big Rapids, has motivated Griffin to set personal goals for the project: “Promote literacy and volunteering in the schools and/or library.”

Engaging the kids will be an integral component of Griffin’s efforts. One of the ways she hopes to accomplish this is through a contest to acknowledge the most improved readers in the first through sixth grades at all of Big Rapids’ elementary schools, with the exception of the Eastwood Early Childhood Center. Griffin has decided to let each school decide the criteria through the teachers and the librarian. Each grade will have a winner with each individual school having five winners. Crossroads Charter Academy, St. Mary’s Catholic School and St. Peter’s Lutheran School will include a kindergartener.

“The winners will each have their pictures taken, individually, with the FSU Bulldog,” said Griffin, who is emphasizing that improvement of reading skills is more important than simply the quantity of books read. “We will make an 11-by-17 poster for the child and one for the school. Afterwards, I will speak with the schools to see if this project had an effect on whether the children read more or if it was the same.

“I will then write a report on it to MCC,” added Griffin, who hopes this idea inspires teachers to conduct their own similar contests in the future as she hopes to have her grant extended into the future. “If it does make a difference, I intend to get the schools involved next year with Ferris to ‘own’ the project. Part of my job is to bring Ferris into the community and the community into Ferris.”

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