



OneMorgan County, Cargill, Leprino Foods, The Colorado Health Foundation join forces to support literacy

Growing Readers program to make Fort Morgan the first community in the U.S. with 100 percent of children entering kindergarten having a 100-book home library

FORT MORGAN, COLORADO, UNITED STATES, November 28, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Located along I-76, 80 miles east of Denver, Fort Morgan, Colorado, is a special place. Founded in the 1880s as a military outpost on the Overland Trail, it has recently become one of the State's most diverse communities. Its current residents, totaling approximately 11,300, love its size, safety, and economic opportunities. The key to sustaining this thriving rural community is to grow talented youth and a key to developing talented youth is ensuring that every child starts kindergarten fully prepared to learn. This begins at an early age.

To ensure Fort Morgan's entire population of 250 four-year-olds have the best possible preparation for kindergarten and beyond, OneMorgan County, a local non-profit, is working with city officials, two of the town's largest employers – Cargill and Leprino Foods – and Colorado Health Foundation to deliver the gift of reading. The whole community will be invited during the holidays to participate in a crowdfunding effort to round out the funding of the project. The groundbreaking Fort Morgan Growing Readers program will ensure that every Fort Morgan four-year-old receives four books each week, from January into July 2019, resulting in personal home libraries of over 100 books.

According to Fort Collins, Colorado-based Unite for Literacy, LLC, supplier of the books as well as associated reading programs for the children and their parents, Fort Morgan will become the first U.S. community in which the entire population of four-year-olds have personal libraries with 100+ books and community-based reading activities.

"Children who enter school with early literacy skills are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success, attain higher levels of education and secure better employment," said Susana Guardado, Director of OneMorgan County. "The result is a stronger community for everyone, so the goal of the Fort Morgan Growing Readers program is to make sure every Fort Morgan child enters kindergarten motivated and ready to learn. We are also excited to share with our community the Unite for Literacy free online library that has over 400 books that are narrated in up to 40 languages to support families that are English language learners."

The program's strength lies in the enthusiastic participation of key community stakeholders. "By providing this gift of reading, we're elevating Fort Morgan to model city status," explained Dr. Rena Frasco, Assistant Superintendent of Morgan Re-E School District. "Our Growing Readers program is a broad community effort lead by OneMorgan County, which will integrate resources from key stakeholders including the community's public, private, and civic sectors. Our goal is to generate a measurable improvement in the 'day one' readiness for Fort Morgan's August 2019 kindergarten class.

"The long-term desired impact is the creation of a robust culture of reading at the individual, family, classroom, and community levels, which leads to reducing achievement gaps and improving graduation rates for people who will contribute to a more vibrant, attractive, and

sustainable community.”

The community’s largest employer, Cargill Protein, took the lead as Fort Morgan Growing Readers’ earliest sponsor. “We celebrate and embrace the diversity of our beef plant’s 2,100 employees,” said Tyler Luft, Cargill’s Fort Morgan plant general manager. “The cultures of more than 20 nations, including the United States, are represented by our team members, yet they all share the common desire to contribute to society. Part of that focus is on ensuring their children have educational opportunities like the Growing Readers program. Supporting programs such as Growing Readers is one way Cargill helps people and communities thrive, which is why we are proud to be part of this initiative.”

“Our intention is to engage with the community where we live and work and make a positive lasting impact,” stated Leprino Food Company’s Fort Morgan Plant Manager David Merriam. “Leprino Foods has a sizable business footprint in Fort Morgan with 375 employees. With the support of the Leprino Foods Company Foundation, we are proud to be part of this worthwhile program and bring to fruition a lifetime love of reading through the gift of books.”

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