

Arabian Horse Literacy Project
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Core school hopes to increase student literacy by reading to horses



By Wendy Winiewski Reporter

Watch above: core school hopes to increase literacy by having students read to horses

SASKATOON – Elementary students from Westmount Community School met a gentle giant Thursday. Sox is an 11-year-old Arabian horse from the Edmonton area. The gentle yet spirited gelding is part of the Arabian Horse Literacy Project which launched in Alberta seven years ago.



“Our intent was to motivate kids to want to read. It has far surpassed that” said project founder Gary Millar.

Students meet the horse, are provided equine reading material and are encouraged to practice in the weeks prior to a class field trip to the farm stable. This is where they’re given the opportunity to read to the horse.

It’s something grade 5 student Danielle Roberts would find far less intimidating than current practices.

“I know I get scared when I’m reading to my class,” she said and confirmed most classmates at her school feel the same.

Fourteen schools in Alberta are part of the program. Westmount hopes to be the first in Saskatchewan.

According to school librarian Leslie Basky, as a core neighbourhood school with a transient population teachers at Westmount are pushing to get all students at or above grade level.

Basky says the third and final round of tests for the 2013-14 school year have just concluded.

“We’ve found of course, there are areas that we always are looking for improvement,” said Basky, who thinks the horse program would be a perfect fit.

Reading material featuring Sox has been provided to the students but with Sox going back to Alberta the school needs a local stable to partner with so students can read to a horse rather than just reading about one.

“Reading to a horse would give me more confidence,” said Roberts.

Millar says the project works like magic, proudly talking about an autistic child who’d never read a word in her life, reading aloud to the horse after just three encounters.

Aside from the literacy project, Sox is also in Saskatoon for the Arabian Horse Championship Competition, where three judges will rank 120 horses in everything from their jumps, to their appearance and showmanship.

The 65th event is taking place at Prairieland Park from June 20-22. The competition begins at 8 a.m. daily.

There’s a special event Saturday at 7 p.m. where the public will learn about the horses, see various demonstrations and have a meet and greet with the horses.



Wendy Winiewski

Reporter

Wendy covers city hall for the Evening News and News Hour Final.