

Thursday,  
March 2, is

# Read Across America Day



# THE NEWS GAZETTE

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## Guthrie Center First Grade Class Learns Braille To Assist Classmate Dustin Todd



As a special activity, the Guthrie Center first grade classes used beads and bangles to write their names on T-shirts. Showing off their shirts are, from the left: Sara Zimmerman, who teaches Braille as a specialist from Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Mikayla Downing, Dustin Todd and Brooke Boals. Mrs Downing and Mrs Boals are Guthrie Center elementary teachers.

By Luann Waldo

Students in the Guthrie Center first grade class are learning to read. Because of one of their classmates, they're also learning Braille. Dustin Todd is a visually impaired student in Mrs Mikayla Downing's first grade class. Working with his teacher and a specialist from Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IES-BVI), the students are experiencing Braille as their classmate learns it too.

Dustin was born a little early, according to his parents, Debbie and David Todd of Guthrie Center, arriving at 35 weeks. One complication from his premature birth was a detached retina. He has undergone several surgeries on his eye but the doctors were unable to repair his vision.

He wears glasses, not so much for his vision but for protection of his "good" eye. The Todds have been advised he will probably always wear glasses.

Dustin doesn't let his vision slow him down. "He's pretty much a typical little boy. He loves to play outside," said Debbie. "He enjoys the swing set and playing on the slide."

He has his own tablet that he uses to take pictures of everything. With the tablet, he can enlarge the photos so he can see them better.

When Dustin started preschool, the Todds asked the school district what services were available for visually impaired students. He had been in an early access program so they knew there were services for him. School officials contacted IESBVI who recommended Sara Zimmerman to work with him.

Sara and Dustin meet for 30 minutes three times a week where they work on a variety of lessons. Sara tries to make each lesson fun.

"He wants to be with his classmates and he likes to ask questions. He's very curious," explained Sara. "He's

confused why he needs to learn Braille when he can see but he's getting more excited about it.

"I try to make it special. He's wants to show off now," added Sara. "He really likes pushing down on the Braille."

Dustin's classroom teacher, Mrs Downing, is his advocate, striving to be sure he can see the work going on in the room. She read the biography of Louis Braille to the class during story time to help his classmates understand Braille and what Dustin is learning.

"It was so cool to see them be so excited about this biography," shared Sara.

"I'm very patient about helping students to become better friends to all kids. Just because someone is different, they are who they are," continued Downing. "They have so much to offer. That's what I really want for these kids. He is a typical first grade boy. I want them to understand that. I'm hoping that we can help people see that."

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~ ~ ~ Mikayla Downing  
Guthrie Center  
First Grade Teacher

Zimmerman has been a great resource to Downing, assisting her in finding the activities for the class. Together, they introduced Braille to the students, using dual print and Braille books. Soon Dustin's classmates wanted to use the books and wanted to learn Braille too.



Dustin Todd made the letter "G" using the pegs.

It's not easy for Dustin. Not only is he learning to read using his sight but he is learning to read the words in Braille at the same time.

Before the holiday break, the students made Braille T-shirts. The shirts were furnished by Mrs Downing's sister, Faith Hockenberry, who owns Faith's Fashion Designs in Guthrie Center. She has Down Syndrome with visual impairment but with the support of her mother and a job coach, is operating her successful business.

Faith joined the class as they designed their T-shirts using beads and bangles, putting their names on them in Braille. The class is keeping their shirts at school to wear as they enjoy other special projects.

"It was so fun to see the kids work with her; to interact with her," shared Downing. "It was really fun to see her in that role too."

On January 4, both first grade classes celebrated Louis Braille's birthday with a variety of activities. The Department of the Blind provided a guest reader for story time, Denise Bean who is the chil-

dren's librarian. The Department of the Blind also provided instruction to the class on white canes and how visually impaired people use them.

Sara had made index cards with the names of the students in Braille. The class worked with stickers to line up their names in Braille. They also viewed a video on the correct way to read Braille.

Sara travels western Iowa, assisting six students with visual impairment in several school districts. She works with infants to high school seniors. Her goal is to prepare them to live with their disability as an adult.

"I make sure that they've got access to the information they need to get their education," added Sara.

As Dustin and his classmates grow up together, Mrs Downing hopes the class will appreciate their friends for their abilities and relish their friendship.

"I feel when they are this young, they are open to differences, willing to learn and embrace them," concluded Downing. "We need to start young and nurture them."

## Supervisors Continue Work on New Budget

The Guthrie County Board of Supervisors is continuing their work on the 2023/2024 budget. The bulk of the budget presentations have been made. Now the Board has some difficult decisions to make as Auditor Dani Fink plugs the figures into the budget.

The problem with the valuations caused by an error made by state officials is closer to being resolved. Governor Kim Reynolds signed a bill on Tuesday morning which is meant to solve the problem. It also gives the taxing entities more time to complete the budgeting process.

The Guthrie County Fair Board met on Thursday with the Supervisors. They asked to maintain the same level of funding: \$30,000 for ground improvements and up to \$8,000 for 4-H / youth expenses. Scott McClellan and Tyler Carney made the presentation, providing updates and future plans. Both men expressed their appreciation for the funding from the County.

"The future is bright," said McClellan about the fair. "The contiguous counties are struggling. Livestock entries have dropped off but we have been holding steady for five-to-six years," explained Carney. "Over ten years, our numbers have dropped. We're fortunate to have the fair that we have. The grounds are used more than it ever has been."

The Fair Board expects to improve the two bath houses. They direct 30 percent of the camping revenue back into the campgrounds with most of the money used for electrical upgrades. There are light poles that need to be replaced and there's a need for more seating at the grandstand.

The sewer project will go out to bids in March following final approval of the blue prints. It is hoped the work will be completed by the end of June.

Tuesday the Guthrie County Airport Authority reviewed their budget with the Supervisors. Lance Levias and Matt Peary, board members, noted the runway apron is in need of replacement as the same concrete problems have surfaced that plagued the runway prior to its replacement. The apron is in design phase with construction planned in two phases. The costs are estimated at \$130,000 for design and in excess of \$640,000 for construction.

A larger fuel facility is needed. An additional hangar would allow more space rental for additional airplanes. With the growth of the metro area, more plane owners are looking to use airports within driving distance.

Tuesday the Supervisors went over the Health Services budget with Jotham Arber and the Sheriff's Department with Marty Arganbright. The expenses and income were discussed and changes made.

## Read Across America Week

Read Across America Week is celebrated from March 2 to 6 — it begins on the birthday of the beloved author, Dr. Seuss. The entire month of March, in fact, is dedicated to reading. The National Education Association (N.E.A.) aims to encourage reading and educate people about its benefits, especially among children and young adults. Events are organized across the nation by schools and organizations to promote the same.



The students in the Guthrie Center first grade colored in the dots that represent the first letter of their name in Braille as an activity to learn more about Braille.



Dustin Todd presented a Braille T-shirt to Denise Bean, children's librarian of the Iowa Commission of the Blind.



Students in the Guthrie Center first grade class are learning Braille to show support to their classmate, Dustin Todd. As a learning activity, they colored the dots of the letter of their first name. They also decorated the

T-shirts they are wearing using beads and bangles, spelling out their first names in Braille. The shirts were donated by Faith Hockenberry, owner of Faith's Fashion Design, and sister of teacher, Mikayla Downing.



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