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Children's/Young Adult (YA) Author Event

Tim Green Author Visit

Community Engagement Project Grant Final Report

Roxanne M. Forgrave

Why should children's and young adult authors visit schools? Gutman (2013) states it well on his website: "When kids get the chance to meet the author of a book they've read, a special connection is made. They are energized, inspired, touched with a new appreciation for reading. I know, because I've visited hundreds of schools" (*The Perfect Author Visit*). The Olivet Nazarene University (ONU) Education Department, in partnership with the ONU Department of English and Modern Languages, and Benner Library, has been sponsoring one children's/young adult author visit per year since 2009, including such authors as Laura Crawford, Gary Schmidt, Sharon Draper, Andrea Davis Pinkney, Tim Green, and Eric Rohmann.

On March 20 and 21, 2013, Tim Green, a former National Football League (NFL) player for the Atlanta Falcons, visited ONU and the Kankakee area. Green, a lawyer, began writing books for adults, but a publisher suggested that he begin writing for middle school aged boys in particular. Thus, Green wrote *Football Genius*, the first of a football series. Currently Green has written 25 books total, of which 13 are for children and young adults. Since 2007 when he

started writing for children, he has been publishing about two books per year, a baseball themed book in the spring and a football themed book in the fall.

During the summer of 2012, Dr. Forgrave contacted the author, spoke with his wife, and made all of the arrangements for the March 2013 event. Green requested no evening events, so six events were planned, including several Bourbonnais and Kankakee school visits and a presentation on the ONU campus (see Appendix A). Because there was no evening event, the Kankakee Public Library chose not to partner with ONU as they had done in the past, but Kankakee School District #111 did.

For this grant, two objectives were identified. The first objective was that ONU Education and English students would personally meet a children's author, read his/her books, and gain an understanding of the field of children's literature and writing children's books. Approximately 50 Education and English ONU students met Green when they helped at the ONU event, which was held in Chalfant Hall. The ONU students formed a tunnel for the visiting area fourth through eighth grade students as they entered Perry Center and walked to Chalfant Hall. Green also spoke about how to write books for children and young adults to 32 ONU students in the after hours study room (fishbowl) of Benner Library. ONU students in EDUC 269 Children's Literature were required to read at least one of Green's books. Several students read more than one book. S. Abner (personal communication, October 2012) read one book and visited Dr. Forgrave's office to purchase more books. Abner became an immediate fan. Gaining an understanding of children's literature is more difficult to measure, but recommending Green's books to reluctant readers is one way to measure. Several students recommended Green's books to practicum and student teaching students. K. Posing and K. Carlson (personal communication, April 2014) each recommended his books to fifth and sixth graders in their student teaching

classrooms this past spring. Both students showed their classes their personally autographed books by Green.

The second objective of the grant was for area students and community members personally to meet a children's author and read his/her books. On March 20, 2013, 1680 fourth through eighth grade students, teachers, and news reporters attended Green's presentation at ONU. Greeted by ONU students, Toby the tiger, and a small jazz band, students filed into Perry Center and Chalfant Hall. Fourth through eighth grade students attended from Bradley West, Bradley Central, Clifton Middle School, Limestone Grade School, Shabbona Elementary School, St. Joseph's School, Maternity BVM and others (see Appendix A). For one hour Green captivated the audience through his motivational presentation which included his personal stories and philosophy about sports as well as education. Two different reporters from the *Kankakee Daily Journal* and one reporter from ONU interviewed Green following the presentation. One student from each school was invited to attend a sandwich luncheon in the Benner Library fishbowl, an event which gave those students some individual attention from Green. Regarding the luncheon, A. Mountain (personal communication, March 20, 2013) stated "M Clarke, our student that attended the luncheon, said on the way back to school, that this was the best day ever!" After all events (see Appendix A), a total of nearly 3300 students and community members heard Green speak. The Green author event had the highest attendance of all of the ONU author events.

At the end of each of the six events, Green autographed books for teachers and children. More than 400 books were ordered and autographed during the two-day event. Two very popular titles were *Rivals* and *Unstoppable*.

Since Green's visit to ONU, stories about his books and influence continue to be shared.

A. Mountain (personal communication, March 20, 2013) stated:

Thank you for all of the work that you did to bring Tim Green to Olivet and our community. It was an amazing day and wonderful opportunity for our students! Tim Green did a remarkable job connecting and motivating the students. I appreciated his messages that character really does count and that education brings freedom. These are ideas that need to be conveyed to our students. I appreciate your generosity in including Shabbona in this event.

Teachers from Bourbonnais Upper Grade Center commented that Green spoke about what they had been teaching all year: the importance of education, reading, and character. Regarding the two-day experience, Green wrote on Facebook, "It was so fantastic. As good as it gets."

In the fall of 2012, Green's book *Unstoppable* was published. This book, like his others, is written so that when the reader gets to the end of a chapter, he or she does not want to stop reading. Because this book was so captivating for readers, Dr. Forgrave recommended that this book be submitted to the Caudill Young Readers' Book Award list for Illinois fourth through eighth graders. It was one of 100 recommended titles, but the list was narrowed down to 20, and in January 2014, the Caudill committee announced that Green's book *Unstoppable* made the list of 20. For the next year, Illinois students in fourth through eighth grades will read these books and then vote for their favorite. The winner will be announced in March 2015.

Green encourages teachers and students to "like" his Facebook page. By doing so, they can read about free books and sets of books that Green gives away to teachers and librarians. ONU students shared experiences with Green's books. Zelhart, a junior high language arts teacher in Momence and ONU graduate, has had several positive experiences with Green and his

books. On November 6, 2013, Zelhart (personal communication) explained that one of her seventh grade students said he “hated reading.” Zelhart gave him one of Green’s books on Monday and by Wednesday he was done, stating, “That’s the best thing I’ve ever read!” Miller (2014) states “Students are more willing to try unfamiliar books when I endorse them” (p. 58). For Christmas, Zelhart gave this boy one of Green’s books and had it autographed. Green sent Zelhart an autographed book plate to put in the new book. On February 23, 2014, Zelhart reported that this same boy said, “If he [Green] stops writing books I’ll have nothing to read.” In February, 2014, Green offered 10 teachers a set of 20 copies of his new spring book, *New Kid*, if they could get 200 likes to their post. Zelhart was successful and received 20 copies of the book to be used in their spring reading promotion.

The success of the Green author visit required funding from several partners. Each of the departments: Education, English and Modern Languages, and Benner Library each contributed \$1000. Kankakee School District added \$1500. The ONU community engagement grant provided \$2500. Green was the most expensive author we have hosted. His normal fee is \$5,000 per day, but he came to ONU for \$6,000 for two days. This amount included his hotel and travel expenses. Green donates the total amount of his fee to provide books for high poverty schools so that all students can have access to his books. The financial breakdown was as follows:

INCOME:

\$1,000	School of Education
\$1,000	Benner Library
\$1,000	English & Modern Languages
\$1,500	Kankakee School District #111
\$2,500	Community Engagement Grant

\$7,000 Total Income

EXPENSES:

\$6,000 Green's Fee

\$ 400 Luncheon at Benner Library

\$ 250 Media

\$ 125 Luncheon at 164 North, Kankakee, IL

\$ 225 Free books for select students

\$7,000 Total Expenses

The author visit by Tim Green was more successful than the Children's/Young Adult Author Committee imagined. Stories about the influence of his books on student readers in the Kankakee community continue to be shared. Wilson (2013) summarizes the importance of an author visit by stating:

The value of an author or performance poet visiting a school cannot be overstated: it is worth every penny. If only one child is inspired to read or write when before they lacked confidence or motivation then that is of huge significance. Author visits are not for the rich schools or those who need to raise the profile of reading in their school, they are for everyone. I urge every school to make that extra effort to find the funding to invite an author or performance poet into your school – you won't regret it. (p. 41)

Each year the committee will continue to bring high quality children's/young adult authors to the Kankakee area and Olivet Nazarene University.

References

Gutman, D. (2013). *The perfect author visit*. Retrieved from

<http://www.dangutman.com/pages/planvisits.html>

Miller, D. (2013). *Reading in the wild: The book whisperer's keys to cultivating lifelong reading habits*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Wilson, T. (2013). An author visit changed my life. *Prep School*, 76, 41.

APPENDIX A

TIM GREEN AUTHOR VISIT: ATTENDANCE PER EVENT

Wednesday, March 20 Author Event in Chalfant at ONU

Approx. 1680 in attendance:

- 93 Shabbona Elementary School (4th graders)
- 152 Bradley West (4th & 5th graders)
- 8 KCHE – Kankakee Christian Home Educators
- 172 MBVM – Maternity BVM Catholic School (5th - 8th graders)
- 70 St. Paul Lutheran (5th - 8th grade)
- 122 Reed Custer Intermediate School (5th grade)
- 11 Unity Christian – no show
- 434 Bradley Central (6th - 8th grade)
- 110 Bonfield Grade School (5th grade)
- 45 Reed Custer Middle School (some 7th & 8th graders)
- 114 St. Joseph (4th - 8th grade)
- 45 Momence Junior High School (7th grade)
- 95 Nash Middle School - Clifton (7th grade)
- 215 Limestone Grade (7th & 8th graders)

Luncheon following the event:

- 7 KCHE – Kankakee Christian Home Educators
- 3 Bradley Central
- 2 St. Joseph
- 2 Kankakee School District
- 2 Nash Middle School
- 2 Shabbona
- 2 Momence Junior High School
- 4 BUGC (actually attended luncheon on Thursday)

Author Visit at Lincoln Cultural Center (2 events)

- 300 King Middle School, Kankakee, IL Grades 4-5
- 110 Montessori Magnet, Kankakee, IL Grades 5-7

Thursday, March 21

- 567 BUGC, Bourbonnais, IL Grades 7 - 8

- 574 Liberty Intermediate School, Bourbonnais, IL Grades 5 & 6

- 32 Writers' Workshop in Benner Library Fishbowl, Bourbonnais, IL
ONU Students, Staff, and Faculty in attendance