

## News from Early Learning Coalition of Marion County

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“It was like gold,” is how Louise Werner described books being passed around in her childhood. Louise came to America as an immigrant when she was a child, and her mother and father never learned to fully speak English. Louise said that her parent’s inability to speak English led them to read more books in their native language, but it was rare to find books written in Russian or German. “I would see him reading. . . cover to cover,” Louise said about her father, “That love was so adamant there, and I saw that as a little girl.”

The love that Louise describes is the love for reading.

Louise has donated \$5,000 to the Reading is Fundamental initiative (RIF), a collaborative project between the Early Learning Coalition of Marion County and Kiwanis Club of Ocala. RIF provides aid to Marion County students as young as four years of age to 2nd grade by distributing free books to them. Louise’s specific donation is going to help RIF expand, so that books can now be distributed to 3rd and 4th grade students as well. Her interest in becoming a donor came from working with schools in Marion County who are trying to ignite a passion for reading and learning in some of Marion County’s youngest populations.

“I’m investing in children,” Louise said about her donation. “I’m investing in their opportunities to grow and learn.”

Louise believes that children who don’t have access to books are limited in what they can learn. She says that the idea of a child not reading and learning is a thought that saddens her.

“I don’t think of it as a donation,” is what Louise said when asked about her donation, “I was thinking of the children who will be given an opportunity to grow.”

Growth is important to Louise. Louise says that when she was a child, she had trouble learning and growing, because her parents weren’t able to help her at a time when she was learning to read a new language.

“I didn’t have that outside support that I needed,” is how Louise described reading English when she was young, “And I needed that.”

Louise hopes that her donation will help children in Marion County to learn and grow at a time in their lives when she had trouble.

Louise Werner continues to be an advocate for learning and literacy in her community through her work with Kiwanis Club of Ocala.



Roseann Fricks (left) and Robert Colen (right) accepting donation to RIF from Louise Werner (center)