



## Feature Stories

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# Tiny tots get an early start with books and sounds at the Doreen Gauthier Lighthouse Point Library

By Phyllis J. Neuberger, Pelican staff

When the Lighthouse Point Library, or LHP library, moved into its current location in the mid 1980s, Doreen Gauthier began a weekly Tiny Tots and Moms story time.

“I believed then, and still do, that the earlier you expose little ones to books and sounds, the better your chance to create lifelong readers,” Gauthier says. “I was inspired by Dr. Henrietta Smith who taught children’s literature at the University of South Florida, and by Dr. Ellin Greene whose book, *Babies and Libraries*, also encouraged me. Greene, by the way, was a part time LHP resident.”

Gauthier’s efforts were a great success. She says, “I get a special thrill when I hear that one of my tots now brings her own little one to the story time.”

And they do! Cathy Anthony, now a LHP librarian, says, “I remember bringing my daughter, Lindsay, to Doreen’s story time and now Lindsay brings her daughter, Mackenzy who adores the group.”

Gauthier recently retired as director of the library. Her successor, Christy Keyes, continues to conduct a story time group for a new flock of tots [ages 18 month to three years] and moms every Friday morning at 10:30 a.m. The Pelican dropped in to see what was happening.

Much to Keyes’ surprise, her Tiny Tots and Moms story time is drawing at least 20 moms and their excited little ones.

She says, “I was happily surprised to see that, despite the tremendous focus on technology, story time is still very popular. The attention span of this age group is very short so we switch focus often moving from an abbreviated book to a song to marching and back to a second book—all in just one half an hour. If the group is very active, we may do only one story. If they seem attentive, we may do two stories.”

She starts out by introducing herself and then each child tells his or her name. Then the group says “Hi and the child’s name.” This may seem very basic, and it is, but these children are being exposed to the library, to books, to group involvement, and they are learning to listen. When the half hour is up, many





moms stay on with their little ones to look at books, work puzzles, or to just enjoy the company of other children. We watch them form attachments and create their own social situations. It's wonderful to see," Keyes says.

One mom, Leila Pollack brings daughter, Alexandria, every Friday if she's not working and says, "We enjoy it so much and miss it when we can't come." Chihiro Kesterson and Ali don't miss a Friday story time. Mom says, "Ali loves to see the other children and listen to the stories."

Beverly Swanson brings grandson, Jaden. She says, "He loves it here and reminds me to come every Friday. I know he looks forward to it."

Julie Lynctt brought her 20 month old daughter, Olivia, for the first time. Olivia sat very still but looked and listened as each child spoke. "This is great. I'm excited by this opportunity to introduce Olivia to the library," said Julie.



When the children in this group outgrow it, they can move right into Miss Jan's group for three to five year olds which meets every Monday from 11 to 12 a.m. Jan Cashette (photo left) who heads up this activity says, "Enthusiasm runs high with my little ones as we read and do crafts. We're not rigid on the ages and welcome a few who are slightly older or younger. Some of the moms bring siblings and we work it out. Any child who loves stories, the written word and hands on crafts is welcome."

Always ready to take on the next generation, this library clearly encourages children to be involved. During the school year, Donna Beale

(photo right) has a Tuesday evening story hour at 7 p.m. for five to eight year olds who bring moms, dads, brothers and sisters. Keyes laughs because Donna's group shows up in both pajamas and street clothing. "It's a great bonding experience for child and parent," she says. "A time when the technology is turned off and child and parent listen to wonderful stories and share some time together at the day's end.."



The Pelican salutes this library, its new director and the volunteer story ladies. Clearly, your doors open wide to children of all ages and their families, inviting them into the world of books, art, lectures, clubs, computers, classes, personal assistance and the newest state-of- the- art technology. No wonder the Doreen Gauthier Lighthouse Point library is known as "the city's jewel."