

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

## Dogs help youngsters with reading



The children read and the dogs listened recently as Children's Lighthouse Learning Center in Deerwood hosted a fundraiser for the Reading Education Assistance Dogs, or READ program, which aims to improve children's reading and communication skills by having them read to trained and certified dogs.

On hand were two READ teams: Maggie and her trainer Linda Tipton and Molly with her trainer Sue Banister.

Children from Children's Lighthouse were given the opportunity to read to the READ teams while their parents could purchase their children's artwork through Original Works, the first company to develop a school-based program focused on the creativity and artistic expression of each and every child.

Artwork created by the children was assembled into packages for each parent. Each package included the artwork, order form, full color brochure and a customized letter describing the program. A portion of the money from those items purchased by parents went to the READ program. A total of \$400 was raised through the READ fundraiser.

Jackson Turner poses with Maggie and Molly at the program, where kids read to dogs. Special

Around the country, hundreds of volunteer READ teams, which consist of owners and their pooches, go into schools, libraries and other settings to work with children.

The team of Maggie and Linda this year has visited places such as Barnes & Noble in the St. Johns Town Center, Juvenile Detention Center, Maxville branch library, Main Library and many other community libraries and facilities.

Children's Lighthouse owner Lucinda Hietbrink partnered with Kelly Blackburn in starting Pawsitive Pets about a year ago in efforts to bring READ to the Jacksonville area.

The READ teams are currently serving Arlington Middle School, Greenland Pines Elementary, Hendricks Elementary, J. Allen Axon Montessori Elementary, New Berlin Elementary, Lakeside Junior High, Ramona Elementary, Jacksonville Public Library, Duval County Detention Center, Children's Lighthouse Learning Center and Barnes & Noble.



Established in 2006, Children's Lighthouse Learning Center at Deerwood provides care and preschool preparation for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old.