



ReadAloud.org

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**CONTACT: BOB ROBBINS**  
[robbins.bob@readaloud.org](mailto:robbins.bob@readaloud.org)  
**231-409-2665**



**Leadership Team  
for Antrim  
County's Big Box  
of Books:** (from left  
to right) Kim  
Musselman, Marcie  
Grabruck, Pami  
Sprague, Amy  
Burk, Stacy  
Knoertzer, Bob  
Robbins, Nancy  
Ludwa, Amy  
Derrer, Sue  
Riegler).

## **ReadAloud.org launches Big Box of Books literacy program in Antrim County, MI**

ReadAloud.org, a national literacy promotion program, is launching the pilot for its Big Box of Books community outreach initiative in Antrim County, Mich., on December 4. This unique program will not only put books in the hands of dozens of vulnerable families, it will also pull together local non-profit organizations, a library and a school to host a dynamic sharing and learning session where children and adults alike will be inspired to make reading aloud a daily part of their lives.

“Each learning and sharing event engages parents and children together, from newborns to age 12, around a knowledge-based theme and includes read aloud demonstrations, inspiring videos from prominent authors, and ends with a pledge by the families to read aloud together at least 15 minutes everyday,” says **Bob Robbins**, co-founder of ReadAloud.org and longtime Alden resident. “The program is supported with ongoing activities at the participating school and library and a monthly calendar tracking read aloud success.”

Antrim County non-profit organizations supporting the program are **Communities In Schools of Mancelona, Mancelona Elementary School, Helena Township Library, Friends of Helena Township Library, and Alden Volunteers.**

Families participating in the learning and sharing program will receive a Big Box of Books containing six books that build knowledge on a core topic. This session's theme is “What Makes A Hero,” inspired by bestselling author and ReadAloud.org supporter Brad Meltzer's book, *Heroes for My Son*, and donated by Harper Collins to each participating family. “The Big Box of Books is designed to build knowledge and ignite a family's curiosity,” says Robbins. “Most

important, it's meant to provide a stage for bonding, learning, and having fun while reading."

Putting books in families' hands is crucial, notes Robbins, but "what makes this program unique is that it goes beyond delivering books to children. We bring local non-profit organizations, a school and a library together, and they all work in tandem to support and stage the twice-yearly learning and sharing events where the Big Boxes of Books are distributed to low-income families."

Amy Burk, Executive Director of Communities In Schools of Mancelona, says the Big Box of Books program is a perfect complement to her group's mentoring and reading initiatives because it brings families together and encourages reading aloud at home. "We know If a child is not reading at grade level in first grade there is an 88% probability the child will not be reading at grade level by fourth grade," Burk says. "We know children are made readers by early exposure to books in the home and reading aloud with their parents or caregivers."

"If there are no books in the home and no time reading aloud with the family, it is unlikely a child will be ready to read when he or she begins school," Robbins adds. "And, unfortunately, too many parents were not read to as children so they do not realize how good it feels to read to their child and how necessary it is for their child to learn and grow."

"Prior to kindergarten, the range of exposure to reading aloud can be as little as 25 hours to as much as 1,000 hours," Robbins notes. "We want to close this gap."

Retired teacher and Bellaire resident Nancy Ludwa, president of the Helena Township Friends of the Library, says the group's decision to support the Big Box of Books program financially and with volunteers was unanimous. "Helena Township Library Director Sue Riegler and I are looking forward to our first learning and sharing event in December as an opportunity for our members to demonstrate reading aloud techniques to local families, but also as a way to let the families experience all the resources our amazing little library offers."

In 2011 the program will be expanded locally in Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties as well as many more communities in Southern Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

ReadAloud.org's national non-profit partners include the Library of Congress' Center For the Book, First Book, and Communities In Schools. ReadAloud.org is working with private foundations, community foundations, and service organizations including Rotary International, Kiwanis, Zonta International, and Boys & Girls Clubs in expanding its Big Box of Books program in Michigan, and bringing it to Ohio and Pennsylvania in the coming year.

ReadAloud.org is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that works to ignite a passion for reading aloud in families nationwide. Its reading program seeks to improve literacy skills, drive knowledge-based learning, and enhance communication across generations while building stronger family bonds.

For more information, please visit [www.ReadAloud.org](http://www.ReadAloud.org).