

PRISCILLA SPARKS



Priscilla Sparks, a literacy advocate, prepares to read for children at Derbyshire Place in Daytona Beach, one of many places where she volunteers. NEWS-JOURNAL/JIM TILLER

'Passionate about reading'

Storyteller inspires children's love of books

By Jim Abbott
jim.abbott@news-jrnl.com

Whether it's magic pasta or a turkey reluctant to be on the Thanksgiving menu, storybook characters exist beyond the printed page when Priscilla Sparks reads to children.

Sparks, a family literacy volunteer in the Pierson Elementary School area, approaches the telling of every whimsical tale as if she were acting in a grand theatrical production.

That includes costumes, such as the Italian chef's garb that she wears to bring to life "Strega Nona," the title character in a favorite story by children's author Tomie dePaola.

"Strega Nona is an Italian grandmother who has a magic pasta," said Sparks, 68, who refined her storytelling skills over more than four decades as a volunteer at Westside Elementary School in Daytona Beach.

"She cooks pasta and there's always a

character in the story who doesn't pay attention, so the spaghetti takes over the whole town."

In Pierson, Sparks volunteers with Food Brings Hope, a nonprofit organization to support children and families coping with hunger due to homelessness, poverty or other issues.

The group's funding includes a grant from the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

"She's very passionate about reading, about literacy and about making certain that children have their special needs answered," said Judi Winch, executive director of Food Brings Hope.

There's nothing better than inspiring a child to love reading, Sparks said.

"My biggest glory is when I see them and they say, 'My mommy read me that book last night,'" Sparks said, "just seeing the happiness and the smiles on the children's faces."

— For information on Food Brings Hope, call 386-236-4167.

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