Summer reading made easy with collaboration

Burlington's Phoenix Books has partnered with the Fletcher Free Library to give children hundreds of free books this summer.

Fletcher Free Library's Summer Reading Program is a free eight-week program designed to motivate elementary and middle school students to maintain reading skills during the summer. The program kicks off June 16. Participants can visit the library any time during the first few weeks of the program to sign up and begin reading.

One-third to half of the children who sign up for the program live in low-income families. Children entering grades K-8 in the coming school year are eligible to participate.

This year's Summer Reading Program theme is "Fizz, Boom, Read!" Books about science projects, magic, or anything else that fizzes or booms will be highlighted.

Phoenix Books received a $5,000 check from James Patterson, part of the author's personal distribution of grants to independent bookstores. That money will go toward providing free books to the approximately 1,600 children expected to take part in the Summer Reading Program this year.

Funds will also go to Phoenix Books for Kids program which aims to establish permanent libraries of about 40 titles at each of the summer reading program's satellite locations.

About half of Summer Reading Program participants take part at the Fletcher Free Library's main branch in Burlington, while the other half take part via the satellite locations, including the Boys and Girls Club of Burlington, King Street Youth Center, Parks & Rec Champ Camps, Sara Holbrook Community Center, Burlington School District summer schools and area Department of Agriculture food distribution sites.

Phoenix Books is a locally-owned, independent bookstore with locations in Burlington and Essex. The Essex location also houses a gallery and café.

Beth Wagner of Phoenix Books said, "We wholeheartedly believe that developing a love of reading in children is one of most important things we can do."

Wagner will select the titles for the Phoenix Books for Kids program. Summer Reading Program participants will each be able to choose one title to bring home at the end of the summer program.

The bulk of the capital for Phoenix Books for Kids will come from Patterson's grant this year, but Phoenix Books co-owner Renée Reiner has started fundraising to provide an additional book for each child this summer, and to make the program a permanent part of summer-time for Burlington kids.

For more information, visit www.fletcherfree.org.