

Hillsdale Daily News

Sharing the adventure

Girl, 10, raising money to help classmates have books of their own

By Benjamin Ray

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Gabriella VanAken wants to share her adventures with everybody.

Her book adventures, that is.

The 10-year-old Gier Elementary School student has spent the last two months raising money for her Reading Advantage idea, which will allow her to purchase books for students who may not have them.

VanAken said the idea came from watching students in her classes, both at Gier and in Albion, struggle during class. She became upset that they had problems reading and realized that perhaps the problems were because those students didn't have resources at home.

"I couldn't imagine my life if I didn't have all the books I do now," she said. "I'd be a sad girl to be around."

VanAken is anything but sad, though. With a perky smile, she said she has raised close to \$400 as of this week by soliciting local businesses.

When she gets enough, VanAken will work with her teachers to buy books online for third-graders first, then fourth- and fifth-graders next. She is focusing on children's fiction, reflecting the mysteries and stories she likes to read such as "Because of Winn-Dixie" and anything by Roald Dahl.

She will enlist the support of teachers for book titles and to direct the books to Hillsdale homes that may not have many books.

It's quite an undertaking for a 10-year-old and it has impressed administration.

"I can't think of a student who has followed through the way she has," said Gier Principal Scott Siakel.

VanAken also donates pop can money to Angel Tree each year; she has been in Hillsdale since the second grade and has lived in Albion and California.

"I like the feeling where someone's going to benefit from what you do," she said. "I just feel bad for some people."

Like most children, VanAken likes playing with her friends, but is looking to be a leader someday, perhaps following in her dad's footsteps as a college administrator. He works at Albion College.

Her mother, Annette, is a teacher at Bailey Elementary School and helped her shape the idea after VanAken started complaining.

"She's one of those bleeding hearts," Annette VanAken joked. "I told her 'I don't want to hear it any more unless you're prepared to do something.'"

Seen on the donation jars: "The Reading Advantage — Give and you

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DAILY NEWS / BENJAMIN RAY

Gier Elementary School fourth-grader Gabriella VanAken has been raising money since December to buy books for fellow Gier students who may not have them. VanAken, 10, said the idea came from watching other students struggle to read in class and realizing they may not have resources at home. She has raised around \$400; people can bring more donations or children's fiction books to the Gier library if they wish to help.

BOOKS

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will help literacy so that all children have this advantage in life."

Those jars are at local gas stations and other businesses, and there also is a jar just inside the front door at Gier. People who want to donate books can bring them to the Gier library as well.

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