

# READING WORKS COVER STORY

## Team effort changes lives one word at a time

Mom was an English teacher. For years, she pronounced the words for contestants in the Oshkosh (B'gosh) city spelling bee.

She encouraged me to read by making it a loving, warm, memorable experience. We'd curl up on the couch, my head nestled on her shoulder, and she'd ask me which book I wanted to read. I'd usually point to "Little Toot," that happy little tugboat.

My own kids had their favorites, and so do the pre-K and third-grade children I've tutored for the last two years at Spain Elementary in Detroit — we might get into "The Snowy Day" or "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?"

With any new reader, there comes the magical moment when you can see that the letters on a page have become words and the words have become sentences and the sentences have become stories, images and ideas.

That's when you can see what a difference reading makes.

And that's what reinforces



**PAUL ANGER**  
FREE PRESS EDITOR  
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my commitment and that of the Free Press to Reading Works, a project launched six months ago with an ambitious mission to improve adult literacy — and countless lives — in the Detroit area.

That launch included a special section in the Free Press, interviews on Channel 7, and a special presentation sponsored by Comerica Bank in the Michigan Chronicle.

Besides tackling a serious issue for the future of this community, the inspiration for Reading Works has been the dedicated agencies that have tutored functionally illiterate adults for years — mostly going it alone on shoestring budgets — and the courage of the adult learners themselves.

It is in these classrooms and

tutoring sessions where men and women become better role models for their children; where they learn skills to find a good job; where newcomers study English to become productive citizens; where many advance to workforce training or what had been unthinkable — higher education.

Where dreams take hold. But studies tell us what a mountain we have to climb as a community; almost half of adults in Detroit, for instance, are estimated to be functionally illiterate. Across Michigan, it may be as high as one in three. If it takes a village to raise a child, it will take a community effort to truly boost adult literacy.

Reading Works is all about a collaborative approach, working together with literacy agencies sharing best practices and enlisting the community to provide more support. The nine agencies working with us are going to expand, and we'll add agencies and pilot programs with more tutors to serve more students.

We're also enlisting donors. With an energetic board of

directors, diverse media partners and the leadership of honorary chairs A. Alfred Taubman, Judge Damon J. Keith and Free Press columnist Rochelle Riley, we have transformative goals.

The first is to teach 30,000 adults by the year 2017. To do that, we need to raise \$1 million this year and \$8 million over the next five.

Private funding for adult literacy has historically been insufficient and inconsistent, and public funding is close to nonexistent anywhere — a tiny fraction of what is allocated for Head Start programs, K-12 or higher education.

Reading Works aims to supply the missing piece in our education efforts. But we're not in this alone.

Here's what Reading Works has done since last fall:

- Hired Executive Director Susie Schechter, an attorney who has worked with the American Lung Association in Michigan. "What excites me most — Reading Works is completely innovative," she says, "recognizing a big problem but approaching it in a

new way."

- Purchased a data-collection program called CauseEffect and paid for training so literacy agencies can efficiently track their learners' progress.

- Created the Pathway to Literacy Fund. Agencies can apply for small grants to help individual learners who struggle to get to their lessons because of myriad issues — such as transportation or child care.

- Partnered with Essilor, a company providing free vision screening and reading glasses to any learners who need them. Enlisted by Oakland Optometry, which had read about our efforts, Essilor was able to secure more than 1,000 glasses from FGX International, a leading manufacturer of eyewear.

- Arranged a partnership with United Way's 211 hot line, which will soon start referring people who need help with reading to a literacy agency.

- Established with Dean Jerry Herron of the Irvin D. Reid Honors College at Wayne State University an Office of Adult Literacy. It will be a resource for all agencies, provide an

outlet for WSU students to do community service as tutors and mentors, and hold regional conferences on best practices.

And Wayne State, with the support of President Allan Gilmour, has begun planning for a national symposium on adult literacy to be held in 2013 on the WSU campus. We aim to make Detroit a beacon for problem-solving that can benefit communities nationally — and around the world.

As the community comes together in common cause — Reading Works expects to announce more progress soon — we all know how important it is to have a better workforce, a populace bristling with higher skills, and more children who find a warm reading experience at home and do better in school.

From a human standpoint, what literacy also comes down to is this, as Reading Works board member Cindy Pasky puts it:

"Imagine if you couldn't write a note to someone to say I love you."

■ PAUL ANGER IS EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF THE DETROIT FREE PRESS.



KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/DETROIT FREE PRESS

Reading Works offers an opportunity for Wayne State University's Another Chance adult education program and others to reach people who need help to improve their reading skills and chances of getting a job in this economy. Another Chance student Devaughn Averitte, right, is studying for his GED.

### I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Amount of gift:

You can donate online by electronic payment at [www.readingworksdetroit.org](http://www.readingworksdetroit.org) or by going to [Facebook.com/readingworks](https://www.facebook.com/readingworks). Or make checks or money orders payable to:

**Reading Works**  
615 W. Lafayette  
Detroit, MI 48226

(PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH OR MERCHANDISE.)

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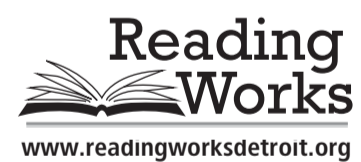
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## TAUBMAN-KEITH: 'Can you think of a more important way to make a difference?'

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are also inspired by those who do enter literacy programs as adults and turn their lives around — people such as Luvanis O'Neal, a woman profiled in a Free Press section last fall devoted to Reading Works.

Luvanis summoned the courage to admit she needed help. She was so ashamed of her secret that, while working at a McDonald's cash register, she had to memorize the keys because she couldn't read the words on the menu.

She entered the Mercy Education Project, one of nine literacy agencies currently partnering with Reading Works. She spent two-plus years learning to read, and she got her GED. Now her 8-year-old daughter can get her mother's help with homework. And Luvanis can do so much more with her own life.

#### Cycle can be broken

Reading Works holds the

#### A HISTORY OF SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

**Alfred Taubman** and **U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Damon J. Keith**, honorary chairs of Reading Works, have been friends for 40 years and frequent partners in projects to improve the Detroit community, especially through education.

Keith, who will be 90 on July 4, is a senior judge of the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals. A former cochairman of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, Keith was appointed a federal judge in 1967 and served as chief judge of the U.S. District Court for Eastern Michigan. He was nominated to the federal Court of Appeals in 1977. Keith's many honors and awards include the Spingarn Medal, the highest honor of the NAACP, and the American Bar Association's Thurgood Marshall Award.

Taubman, 88, is the founder of Taubman Centers, one of the nation's leading real estate developers and operators of regional shopping centers. He is a renowned philanthropist who participates in and supports a wide range of civic, cultural and educational institutions and activities. Taubman established and funds the A. Alfred Taubman Medical Research Institute at the University of Michigan Medical School, the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School, and Brown University's Public Policy and American Institutions program. He is the principal benefactor of the U-M College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Health Care Center and Medical Library.

promise of helping many thousands of people. It's a coordinated effort to raise money and connect a variety of social ser-

vices to support well-tested local programs that improve adult reading levels. The graduates of these programs gain a

### Our 2012 Partner Agencies

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313-873-READ (7323)  
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**Dominican Literacy Center**  
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[www.dlcliteracy.org](http://www.dlcliteracy.org)

**Macomb Literacy Partners**  
586-286-2750  
[www.macombliteracy.org](http://www.macombliteracy.org)

**Mercy Education Project**  
313-963-5881  
[www.mercyed.net](http://www.mercyed.net)

**Oakland Literacy Council**  
248-253-1617  
[www.oaklandliteracy.net](http://www.oaklandliteracy.net)

**Siena Literacy Center**  
313-532-8404