

LITERACY

# Along for the ride ... and loving it

*Rotary Read-A-Long program a hit with students, volunteers*

By DANETTE DOOLEY

SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM

**R**aymond Doyle-King was so excited Monday morning, he couldn't quite remember his age.

"Now I know — I'm five now and I'm going to be six soon," Raymond said, sitting on a small chair next to four of his kindergarten classmates in the resource centre at Holy Cross Elementary School in St. John's.

And Raymond wasn't the only one excited. Other students in grades K-6 were delighted that special guests were coming in to read to them.

St. John's East Rotary Club president Jeff Peddle started Rotary's Read-A-Long program about five years ago.

Since its inception, the program has helped Rotarians raise more than \$130,000 worth of books for school libraries throughout the province.

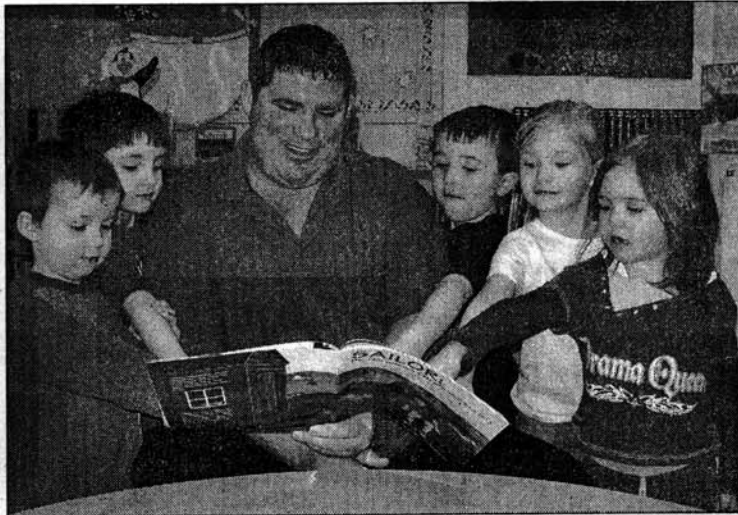
"Our volunteer readers take a couple of hours off to come in and read to the children and some of them will tell you it's the best experience they've ever had," Peddle said.

Rotarian Ted Rowe has become a regular reader with the program.

"I think this is a great way of getting involved in the community and I knew I'd like to go and meet some kids," he said.

"I have grown-up children but I don't have any grandchildren, so I don't get to interact with children anymore."

Janine Lilly, administrative coordinator with Creative Book Publishing, was also eager to head to the classroom.



Jeff Peddle (centre) reads to (from left) Ryan Reddigan, Jack Dawson, Raymond Doyle-King, Abby Walsh and Mackenzie Mahoney at Holy Cross Elementary in St. John's Monday. — Photo by Danette Dooley/Special to The Telegram

"The kids always have lots of questions and reading to them gives us a great opportunity to interact with them and help them understand the importance of reading at an early age," she said.

The kindergarten students Peddle read to on Monday were enthralled by the story of "Sailor — The Hangashore Newfoundland Dog," written by Catherine Simpson and illustrated by Joanne Snook-Hann.

"Buddy was saved when he fell off the ice and Sailor got a gold medal for saving him," Abby Walsh said after the story was finished.

Raymond Doyle-King added: "Sailor's the dog and Ike's the man he saved. He pulled him out of the water by biting his sweater."

Allison Edwards, a learning resource and Grade 3 teacher at Holy Cross Elementary, said the

children look forward to having guests come to their classrooms.

"This program is about sharing the gift of reading and making it a fun experience for all involved," she said.

Sponsors for Rotary's Read-A-Long program include The ABC's of the Real Treat, Bank of Montreal, The Idea Factory, the St. John's Fog Devils, The Telegram and Triware Technologies Inc.

"And the provincial government gives us \$10,000 every year to buy books," Peddle added.

The initiative also supports the province's authors — about 70 per cent of the books bought through the program are written by local authors, published by local publishers and sold in local bookstores like Granny Bates.