

SPELLBINDERS

Volunteers keeping the art of storytelling alive

By Corbett Stevenson
cstevenson
@prairiemountainmedia.com

For more than 15 years, a group of volunteers in Broomfield have been using the art of oral storytelling to offer enrichment opportunities and encourage literacy in their community.

The Broomfield Spellbinders, a chapter of the national Spellbinders organization, consists of a group of dedicated volunteers that spend a few days each month telling stories. Although they primarily work in elementary school classrooms, they also visit senior centers and libraries.

"I asked one of the storytellers if I could go into a classroom with them and watch what happens, and when they walked into the room, the kids went wild, and as they told a couple of stories, the kids sat and listened intently," volunteer Wynn Montgomery said. "And I decided right then and there that I had to at least try that out."

Montgomery has been working with Spellbinders ever since, but his relationship to storytelling goes back to his Southern roots.

"I grew up in rural Georgia ... I think everybody in that part of the world was a storyteller. My grandfather would sit on the back porch and he and his buddies would tell stories and I'd lie around somewhere and listen to them," he said.

Beyond keeping this piece of his history alive, storytelling with the Spellbinders gives Montgomery the opportunity to build and engage with the future.

"Most of (the kids) are hanging on every word. And we usually have some time at the end of the stories to have some brief discussion about who they think the good guys were, who they think the bad guys were, and it gives me a chance to interact with that generation, which I wouldn't have otherwise," he said.

Since joining Spellbinders, Montgomery has become a staple of the organization and now trains new volunteers who are looking to join the ranks.

"Training was just a little bit of the history of Spellbinders, where it started and why we do it. And then a lot of it is spent looking at how to find good stories, and most of it is practicing," storyteller Julie Toepper said. "We would just tell stories to each other and get feedback and discover ways of how to adapt it to your style ... and figure out what kind of story works best for you."

Once training is complete, the Storytellers begin visiting groups of eager listeners. Just

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like Montgomery, Toepper finds that the students she works with are always excited to see her, and eager to hear stories they connect with.

"I told a story in one of the classrooms that was actually a Cherokee legend, and after the class, he came to me and he was so proud. He said his family is Native American ... and he was just so excited

and so proud of the fact that I told a story from his background," she said.

The Spellbinders organization aims to use oral storytelling to enhance literacy and encourage character development in their listeners, a medium that's equally rewarding for the storytellers.

"Sometimes you get kindergarteners love giving hugs, and when you get everybody wanting to give you a hug or a high five as they're leaving it's always really special," Toepper said.



WYNN MONTGOMERY — COURTESY PHOTO

Wynn Montgomery at Aspen Creek Pre-K-8.

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