One of the magical things about a good book is how the story can come alive to the reader. A well-written book often captures its readers with a fascinating plot. Or a character may seem so real, it feels like you know him or her personally. In some cases, the book’s setting may seem so authentic, you find yourself lost in a whole new world. But for students that are non-readers, it can be a challenge to get them to experience such joys that come with books.

However, for Diane Witte’s students at SSD’s Northview High School, reading is more than just the words on the page. Many of her students are non-readers, and many can’t physically turn the pages of a book. But there is at least one book her students know from cover to cover, thanks to the interactive version Witte produced for her students.

The book is “Marshall the Miracle Dog.” It is a true story about a dog that was abused, rescued and eventually found a forever home with the book’s author, Cyndi Willenbrock. After Willenbrock shared the book and brought Marshall to visit with students at Northview, principal Stephanie Valleroy suggested to Witte the idea of making it an interactive book.

With Willenbrock’s permission, Witte turned “Marshall the Miracle Dog” into an interactive version that all students could use and enjoy through the use of symbols, special pictures, sounds and other features that aren’t found in standard books.

“The pictures represent concepts,” said speech-language pathologist Laura Kersting. “To help those that can’t read or have deficits, this is a way to read the book without reading the words.”

“The results were so amazing,” Witte said. “Students could activate the book via the Smart Board. They could answer comprehension questions, state facts, understand the emotions that were happening in the book, demonstrate knowledge of bullying and write a book report. These are huge accomplishments for our students.”

Witte used Boardmaker Plus, a software program that helps develop picture boards and adds other sounds and animation.

When asked about the book, students who benefited from the interactive version are quick to tell you what lessons they learned from it:

• “Never give up, even when things are hard.” —Ariana
• “Marshall was brave. And don’t be mean.” —Josh
• “Marshall got a new house and family. And that made him happy. Also, treat new dogs nice.” —Wayne
• “I liked the book—the words, the pictures—I like it all.” —Christian
• “The bully dogs tried to bite Marshall.” —Steven
• “(Marshall) got attacked. He was worried and nervous and sad and scared.” —Shakeal

Witte reported that the independence students have with the interactive version is highly important. With it, the students can empathize and experience the feelings and emotions that Marshall goes through in the book. Without the added features of the interactive version, the students would not be able to fully relate.

“As a sign-language interpreter for students who are deaf, I know they require visual aids and visual cues,” said interpreter Laura Shields. “They are visual learners. What Ms. Witte has done with this book is how students need to be taught. It makes my job sensible. We can make sense of the language this way.”

Willenbrock, who has visited more than 250 schools with Marshall, said she was overwhelmed by the positive response of the students to the interactive version of her book.

“My heart swelled with gratitude and appreciation for Diane’s hard work,” Willenbrock said. “Students were connecting and retaining the messages. Thanks to Diane and her gift and talent, Marshall finally can make his connection and touch every heart.”
On April 24, the Special Education Foundation and SSD joined together to recognize the outstanding achievements of local students at the annual Commitment to Kids Banquet. This year, 19 students received the Rosemary Zander Award. Others were also honored with financial scholarships for college and summer camps.

The Rosemary Zander Award has long recognized the accomplishments of students receiving services from SSD. Since 1988, students have been honored for success in a variety of categories — academics, arts, athletics, communications, vocational training, employment, independent living skills, community service and extracurricular activities.

Each of the 2014 award recipients has diverse achievements and has had varied challenges to meet and overcome. And they all have demonstrated SSD’s central mission — that all students can learn, succeed and make a successful contribution to our community.

Read about three of this year’s Rosemary Zander Award recipients below. To learn more about each award winner’s inspiring story, visit http://bit.ly/zander2014 to read their individual profiles and watch a video featuring the honorees.

Overcoming Fear Leads to Fulfillment

Jill Kiernan has an infectious smile and she has increased her confidence by taking on new challenges in life. Jill is a senior who receives services from SSD at Hazelwood West High School.

As Jill experienced new challenges when she transitioned to high school, she would sometimes meet them with resistance. While she was doing well in her freshman classes, her physical education (PE) teacher came to Jill’s social worker with some concerns. “She told me Jill was reluctant to attempt to participate in daily group activities,” said SSD teacher Jodi Schutzenhofer, who nominated Jill for the Rosemary Zander Award.

“I spoke with Jill about her concerns,” said Schutzenhofer. “I asked her if she would like a buddy for class time and she said yes. The next time she had PE, Jill left the class with a smile on her face.”

The same types of new experiences would bring Jill some anxiety, but she always overcame her fears. She joined the Peer Buddies club, where students with disabilities attend extracurricular activities with their general education peers.

After some hesitation, Jill decided to give it a try. “Jill went and then couldn’t wait to do it again,” said Schutzenhofer. “The Peer Buddies were smiling because Jill’s attitude was so infectious and Jill left the building with a smile on her face.”

Independence Grows With Vocational Skills Program

Brittany Sudin experienced a transformation when she began work in the food service program at SSD’s Vocational Skills Program (VSP) site at Monsanto.

“Brittany came to our program a very shy and timid young lady,” said VSP teacher Lisa Sinak, who nominated Brittany for the Rosemary Zander Award. Brittany is now in her third year with the VSP site at Monsanto. She has been working in the deli, filling and rotating the food items in the deli dishes and setting up more than 40 items.

Brittany and her sister also experienced a significant life change during her second year at Monsanto. “She and her sister moved into a supported living situation,” said Sinak. “She didn’t miss a beat and she has only continued to improve and maintain her job skills and attitudes.”

Sinak said Brittany has a bright future. “She always works hard and she gives 110 percent five days a week. She is a role model to her classmates as well as her two older sisters.”

Student’s Tenacity Encourages Students and Staff

Cornelius Robinson has harnessed his love of reading to fuel his growth in reading and writing skills. Cornelius, a fourth-grader who receives services from SSD at McKelvey Elementary in the Parkway School District, continues to build his reading skills to match his high levels of comprehension.

“He truly gives 100 percent effort, even when he is frustrated to tears,” said his SSD teacher and Rosemary Zander Award nominator, Lindsay Forshee.
2014 ROSEMARY ZANDER AWARD RECIPIENTS

Matthew Brecklin
Green Park - VSP
Special School District

Logan Foraker
Valley Park High
Valley Park School District

Alexis Henderson
Hazelwood West High
Hazelwood School District

Jill Ellen Kiernan
Hazelwood West High
Hazelwood School District

Amari Yvonne Kirk
Ackerman School
Special School District

Deric J. Liddell
Hazelwood West High
Hazelwood School District

Lens McKeown III
Hazelwood West High
Hazelwood School District

Michael Moore
Green Park - VSP
Special School District

Casey Muhs
Parkway Central High/
South Technical High
Parkway School District/
Special School District

Abigail Elaine Neiner
Hazelwood West High
Hazelwood School District

Donald Phillips
Hazelwood West High
Hazelwood School District

Cornelius Robinson
McKelvey Elementary
Parkway School District

Mayte Santos
Pattonville High
Pattonville School District

Cameron Scott
North Technical High
Special School District

Casey Scott
Webster Groves High
Webster Groves School District

Brittany Sudin
Monsanto - VSP
Special School District

Neil Sulze
Green Park - VSP
Special School District

Stacie Waller
Parc Provence - VSP
Special School District

Asha Wisniewski
Northview High
Special School District

2014 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

SAMMY GOLDMAN
“LIVING BIG” CAMPERSHIP

Anastasia Noblett
Gotsch Elementary
Affton School District

ALLISON M. HAAKE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Mallory Evans
Ladue High
Ladue School District

SSD BOARD OF EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS

Ranita Nichelle Ebene’ Shelton
Hazelwood Central High
Hazelwood School District

Jessica Kuhlmann
Oakville High /
South Technical High
Mehlville School District/
Special School District

BONHOMME LIONS SCHOLARSHIPS

Alexandra Pearl
Eureka High
Rockwood School District

DIANNE ARBEITER SCHOLARSHIP

Alexandra Pearl
Eureka High
Rockwood School District

SPECIAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS

Kyle Anthony-Petter
Kirkwood High
Kirkwood School District

Nicholas Ceriotti
Parkway Central High
Parkway School District

Andrew Hodapp
Clayton High
Clayton School District

Matthew McKenzie
Christopher Davis Scholarship
Eureka High
Rockwood School District

Taylor Nguyen
Parkway West High
Parkway School District

Augustin “Tino” Pacheco
Laura K. Sherman
Laughlin Scholarship
Brentwood High
Brentwood School District

Shelby Whitaker
Valley Park High
Valley Park School District
MISSION: In collaboration with partner districts, we provide technical education and a wide variety of individualized educational and support services designed for each student’s successful contribution to our community.

VISION: Partners for every student’s success

VALUES: student success • collaboration • integrity • stewardship • continuous improvement • equity

Special School District Notice of Non-Discrimination and Accommodation: Special School District does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, ancestry, disability, veteran status, age, or activity protected by federal or state law in its programs, activities and employment. Direct inquiries and complaints under this policy to Special School District’s Compliance Coordinator, 12110 Clayton Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63131; telephone 314.989.8100 or to the Office of Civil Rights, 8930 Ward Parkway, Suite 2037, Kansas City, Mo. 64114-3302; telephone 816.268.0550. Information about the existence and location of services, activities, and facilities accessible to impaired persons can be obtained from Special School District’s Compliance Coordinator at the phone number and address listed above.

www.ssdmo.org

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

The following content is a news article about a teacher being honored by the St. Louis Symphony:

LITZSINGER TEACHER Honored by Symphony

Congratulations to Paula Berner, music teacher at Litzsinger School, on being named the St. Louis Symphony’s 2014 Educator of the Year.

By leading Litzsinger’s annual holiday musical, classroom activities and collaborative initiatives, Paula helps SSD achieve its vision of being a partner for every student’s success.

St. Louis Symphony Music Director

David Robertson presented Berner with her award on stage at Powell Hall just prior to the symphony’s May 10 performance. She was also interviewed that evening during the symphony’s broadcast on St. Louis Public Radio.