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Utica district and USPBL team up to promote reading

By Emilee Gorshe

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Utica Community Schools and the United Shore Professional Baseball League have teamed up again to make sure the students are hitting a "home run" when it comes to their reading.

"The reading partnership reflects the commitment of the entire UCS community to develop a lifelong love of reading in our students," Supt. Christine Johns said in a media release.

As part of the program, Director of USPBL Baseball Operations Brian Berryman, accompanied by Lancelot the Utica Unicorns Mascot, visited Wiley Elementary School on March 16 to read "Casey at the Bat" to the students in celebration of March is Reading Month, which is an incentive-based program that encourages students to meet school reading goals.

"It's a great event," Berryman said. "I love coming out and reading to the kids and spreading the word about Jimmy John's Field and helping kids read."

Wiley Elementary School Principal Christopher Cassin said this is the second time they've held this event at the school, and as long as USBPL runs it next year, they'll be involved. This is the first year Lancelot the Utica Unicorn has visited the school, and it was a surprise to the students.

The reading incentive program - named "Lancelot's Learners League" after the Utica Unicorns team mascot - recognizes students who meet goals for either time spent reading, number of pages read or number of books read during March.

"It's a great competition, and they get to do fun stuff like this and go nuts with the mascots," Berryman said. "So it's pretty cool."

Grade level teams at each school have established reading requirements for reaching first base, second base, third base or home plate.

Students who score a "home run" will receive a ticket to a Utica Uni-



PHOTOS BY EMILEE GORSHE - THE SOURCE

After the reading session, the students bombard Lancelot the Utica Unicorns mascot with hugs of excitement, surrounding him completely.

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corns home game, and their family members will receive a discounted ticket price for the school game night.

Cassin said he believes this event motivates and encourages the students to read more.

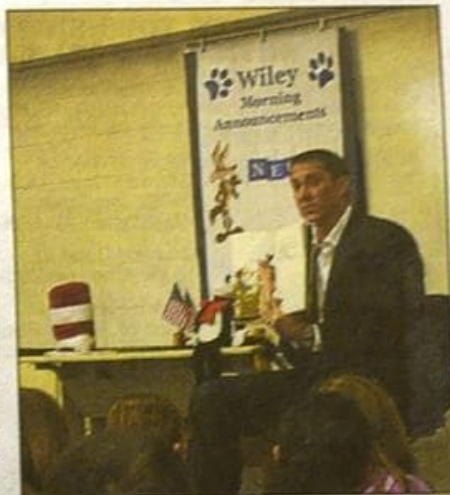
After reading the book, Berryman and Amber Legacy, community outreach coordinator, started a trivia session with the students, asking them questions all relating to baseball.

Before leaving, Lancelot was bombarded with hugs of excitement from the students.

Last year, 10 UCS schools participated in the program, and then this year the program expanded to include 18 elementary schools.

The reading incentive follows other partnerships established by USPBL and UCS.

Over the past year, the district and league have announced \$21,000 in scholarships, student-designed and constructed bat and helmet racks at Jimmy John's Field, upgrades to softball and baseball fields at Eppler Junior High School and a sold out Back to School celebration last Au-



Brian Berryman, director of baseball operations for the United Shore Professional Baseball League, shows the pictures from the book "Casey at the Bat" to the Wiley Elementary School students while he reads the book to them.

gust, according to a media release.

"We are pleased to support Utica Community Schools and its efforts to make sure students have every tool to be successful," said Andy Appleby, league founder and president and chief executive officer of Rochester-based General Sports and Entertainment.