NMSU communication grad students collect 600-plus books for memorial library

PHOTO: Students from the Communication Studies Graduate Student Association held a book drive to collection donations for Jardin de los Ninos. The books were presented at the dedication of the Jackson Whelpley Memorial Library at Jardin de los Ninos. From L-R: Josele Diaz, Beth Cole, Alexis Duprey, NMSU College of Arts and Sciences Professors Anne Hubbell and Greg Armfield, Nicholas Eckhart and Audrey Hardman- Hartley, executive director of Jardin de los Ninos. (Photo by Isabel Rodriguez)

Jackson Carl Whelpley never made it to college, but a library in his honor will provide books for homeless children thanks to a group of New Mexico State University students. The Communication Studies Graduate Student Association in the College of Arts and Sciences organized a book drive that helped collect more than 600 books and magazines for a library at Jardin de los Ninos named in honor of Whelpley, an 18 year-old Onate High School graduate who died after being struck by lightning a day before he was to begin college in Fulton, Missouri.

Jardin de los Ninos, which translates to “Garden of the Children,” is a southern New Mexico nonprofit organization that provides early childhood education and other services to homeless and near homeless children and their families. “After a little research, I learned that 90,000 of our nation’s homeless are children and 80 percent are under the age of three,” said Alexis Duprey, communication studies graduate student. “We thought, ‘What would be better than giving our local homeless or near homeless children the opportunity to hold a book in their hands and either read or have it read to them?’ We are the communication studies department so we thought it was appropriate.”

Along with Duprey, the graduate student association consists of other communication studies graduate students including Josele Diaz, Beth Cole and Nicholas Eckhart, who were present at the library dedication.

Anne Hubbell, communication studies associate professor, organized the book drive. Last year, Hubbell’s students tackled another service learning opportunity -- raising $3,500 and collecting more than 2,500 pounds of food for Casa de Peregrinos, a local food bank. This year’s service
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Teaching our students to be involved in community service is an important part of their education,” said Christa Slaton, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “Service learning requires students to reflect on and learn from the service they provide. Ultimately, we hope these students’ actions inspire others to do the same.”

The students transported hundreds of books and officially donated them at the dedication ceremony for the Jackson Carl Whelpley Memorial Library at Jardin de los Ninos.

Keith Whelpley spoke at the ceremony, recalling his son was an avid reader who enjoyed learning about a range of topics – from the humanities to the sciences and all kinds of literature. He added the teenager would often visit local used bookstores and the Las Cruces Public Library.

The new library at Jardin de los Ninos is a “giving library,” meaning that children are allowed to choose books and keep them.

“What I hope my students learn is that it’s important to give back,” Hubbell said. “We have a responsibility to go out in the community and help. We want to continue doing this and bring in more books because it’s a “giving library” and because it represents this young man, Jackson Whelpley so well.”

PHOTO, left: The Jackson Whelpley Memorial Library at Jardin de los Ninos features a photo of Whelpley. (Photo by Isabel Rodriguez)

PHOTO, right: Nicholas Eckhart, Beth Cole, Alexis Duprey and in the background Josele Diaz.