

Club spreading the word with dictionaries Rotary gives dictionaries to English learners

PITTSBURG: Rotary members pass out free Spanish-English books in adult classes. The service organization has expanded its distribution program to include adults.

By Laurie Phillips

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STAFF WRITER

In the warm basement of St. Peter Martyr Church last week, eight women and one man put down their pencils, settled back in their folding chairs and turned their attention toward a woman behind a stack of books.

"These are to improve your English at school, at work and with your children," Diana Mason told the Spanish-speaking students of the bilingual dictionaries, which each will receive by enrolling in a community-based English tutoring class through Pittsburg Adult Education Center. "Buena suerte a todos" (Good luck to all)

The students opened the volumes and moved their fingers across the pages, and then applauded. They said they were humbled and flattered by the gift.

"With this, I can learn more," said Ana Rosa Preciado of Pittsburg, who said improving her English will help her find work.

Pittsburg's Rotary Club, which for more than a decade has raised money to give away dictionaries to Pittsburg third-graders and thesauruses to ninth-graders, is now giving away Spanish-English dictionaries to adults enrolled in English classes.

The club is spending about \$1,000 to order 100 of the books, which its members recently began giving away. In addition to St. Peter Martyr, classes are offered at Grace Lutheran Church and Parkside, Los Medanos and Willow Cove elementary schools. Ten to 15 students are enrolled at each site.

"Vocabulary is the most important thing that these students can do," said Paulette Lagana

coordinator of the classes. Some students might not have been in a classroom since the first or second grade, she said, and "these dictionaries can help, regardless of how much education each student has had."

Barbara Wilson, superintendent of the Pittsburg Unified School District, said Rotary members approached her with the idea and together they discussed how to reach the most Spanish-speakers who would use and appreciate the dictionaries. At one point, Rotary members said, they considered giving one book to every family. Then someone suggested the classes.

"We thought, if we give it to these people, it will definitely be used," Mason said. The students in the free classes were the best option, he said, based on the presumption that they were interested in improving their language skills.

Gloria Vargas of Pittsburg said she had never seen a bilingual dictionary before she was given one in a class. Classmate Marta Jimenez said the book will be useful not just for her but also for her 14-month-old son, Lionel.

"When he goes to school," she said, "I want to help him with his homework."

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