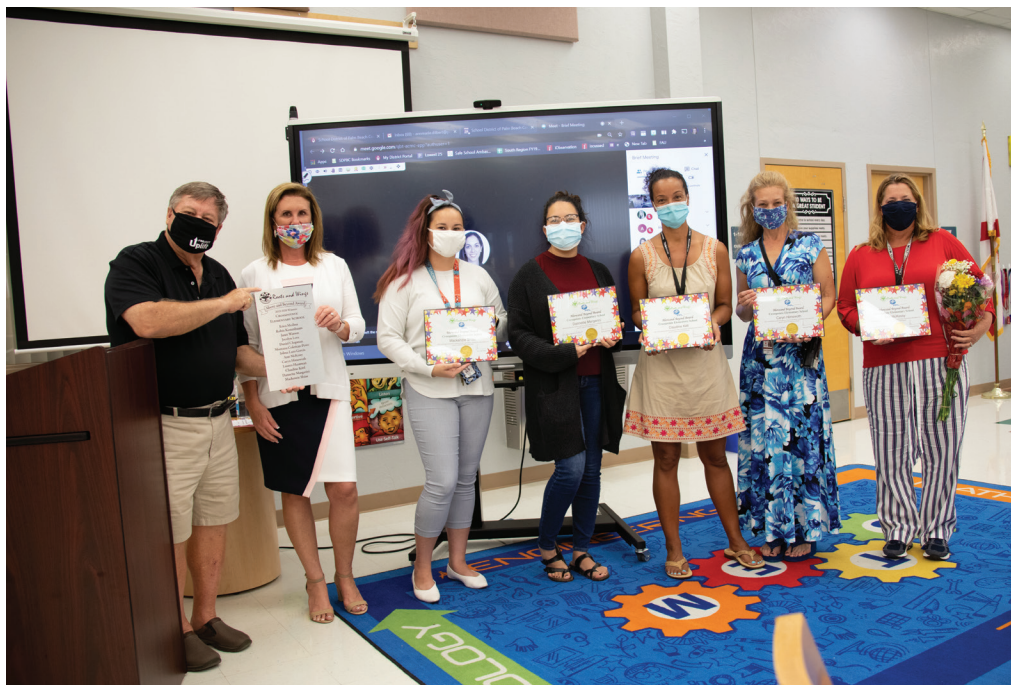


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Project UpLift gives extra boost to students who need reading help

BY JENNIFER SHAPIRO-SACKS, SUN SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT



Honoring teachers and teaching children who need extra help in reading is the premise of Roots and Wings, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Delray Beach. It was started in 2016 by Ted Hoskinson after his wife Anne died.

He said they first started with honoring teachers with the Above and Beyond Awards at Pine Grove Elementary School in Delray Beach and asked the principal what else they needed. He was surprised when she said, “You can help our kids read.”

That’s how Project UpLift started — as a way to help struggling second and third graders attending Title 1 schools in

Delray Beach, Boynton Beach and Boca Raton read.

Project UpLift, a free, intensive small-group after-school tutoring program, is now at seven Title 1 schools as well as a pilot program for first and fourth graders at two of its schools. It’s currently being offered virtually now due to the pandemic, Hoskinson said.

“If you don’t have the basics which are phonics, you can’t succeed. We start where the child is, and give them encouragement to get to the next stage. They can all show up and be a success,” he said.

Students who participate get incentives along the way such as a shirt for

attending the first six weeks, Hoskinson said. They also receive a certificate, get to walk down a red carpet and get a free dessert from Wendy’s.

“We reward them based on their performance...all kids are cheering for each other, and the teachers are inspired. They are all encouraged because they’re all working together for the same goal,” he said.

The teachers tutoring in the program are all certified teachers from that school, Hoskinson said.

Although teacher Kayli Edelman wasn’t a tutor in the Project UpLift program, she did see firsthand the impact the program had on many of her students while she taught second grade at Orchard View Elementary School in Delray Beach, she said.

“As their homeroom teacher, I saw significant gains in their reading and comprehension abilities. The program built on the skills I was using in the classroom and helped reinforce concepts to my students. The benefits of having the program on campus are that students did not have to commute, they’re already familiar with the teachers and I was able to easily communicate with their UpLift tutor about the skills that particular student needed help with,” Edelman said.

Edelman, who lives in Lighthouse Point and now teaches second grade

at a private school in Fort Lauderdale, received the Above and Beyond Award in 2016, 2017 and 2018 from Roots and Wings.

The biannual Above and Beyond Awards honor teachers in 18 Title 1 schools in Delray Beach, Boynton Beach and Boca Raton and teachers nominate their peers based on nine different criteria, Hoskinson said.

“We honor teachers, who in many cases, never have anyone thank them for the job they do,” he said.



Teachers not only receive a framed certificate, but they also get flowers and a bag filled with other items, including gift cards.

A total of 252 teachers and staff are honored each year, and they’ve honored just over 1,000 when the New Year starts, he said.

For Edelman, being recognized for the first time in 2016 when she was a first-year teacher and team leader for her grade level “practically brought her to tears,” she said.

“My day-to-day was heartwarming but exhausting. When I won the award I

was in the middle of teaching a lesson...I was floored. Knowing that my hard work and dedication I have to teach my students was appreciated had me beaming and smiling from ear to ear. That feeling grew even more when Ted and the crew walked into my classroom in 2017 and 2018. I was shocked each time, and the recognition never gets old,” Edelman said.

Terri Robinson, of Boynton Beach, is another teacher recognized with an Above and Beyond Award this year who felt “appreciative” after receiving the award, she said.

“It gave me a warm, peaceful feeling that I have been doing the right thing, and after I got home I read everything again and started crying,” said Robinson, a VPK teacher at Village Academy in Delray Beach.

“I felt gratification because if you are dedicated to your job, whatever it is, you do the right thing with enjoyment and when others recognize it, it’s a good feeling. They are your team and we have to support each other.”

Roots and Wings recently was selected as one of 40 nonprofits out of 2,000 submissions for a State Farm Neighborhood Assist grant for \$25,000.

The grant will be used to acquire Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Collections for Village Academy in Delray Beach, Rolling Green Elementary in Boynton Beach and Coral Sunset Elementary School in Boca Raton, according to Hoskinson.

They will purchase first and second grade guided reading collections impacting reading for thousands of kids over several years through the Project UpLift program as well as during the regular school day.

Over the next four years, Roots and Wings will impact about 8,500 first, second, third and fourth grade students at seven schools,” he said.



“If you can’t read, you can’t learn. The kids we serve and the challenges they face bring them to school far behind, without the tools they need to read well. These students require more resources, more time and more teaching than what the regular school day programs prescribe. That’s why our Project UpLift schools and our kids need these interventional reading materials to help them become successful readers,” Ann Paton, Roots and Wings director of communications and resource development, said in a statement.

Roots and Wings also received a \$50,000 grant from Impact 100 Men and \$100,000 from Impact 100 Women, said Hoskinson, adding they also plan to increase the hours for the tutoring up until 6 p.m. with these grants.

“We have to continue to stretch our mind and imagination. What can we do to make these kids and teachers feel important? We try to award them and give them the inspiration to work with those kids that is self-motivating to them because they really want to learn. That is what I am going to do for the rest of my life,” he said.

Visit [rootsandwingsinc.org](https://www.rootsandwingsinc.org).