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## Ginnie Graham: City officials offer up fun tricks to get kids to read

PREV

City officials offer up fun tricks to get children to read

Ginnie Graham News Columnist 8 hrs ago 0

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Hailey Zumwalt, 14, a Teen Team volunteer at the Tulsa City-County Library, reads with 5-year-old Hailey Zumwalt on Wednesday as part of the library system's summer reading program. COR

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It's with much appreciation that Mayor G.T. Bynum launched the Tulsa library's summer reading program with "A Very Hungry Caterpillar" over his other current selection — "Truman" by David McCullough.

Bynum finished his second read of the historical biography because, obviously, a 992-page tome like that can't be fully appreciated the first time. Next up, "War and Peace" or that really long "Harry Potter" edition.

That's how much Bynum enjoys reading, and he's not alone.

City leaders all point to how reading is essential to their lives — professionally, academically and just for enjoyment. This is why so many support reading programs during school breaks.

They're willing to get a pie in the face, scale tall buildings or even become art canvas in the name of keeping kids engaged in books.

**Incentives:** In May, Bynum issued a challenge to area mayors. The community with the highest percentage of children and teens completing the [Tulsa City-County Library's summer reading program](#) will get a plaque

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and bragging rights.

Then, Tulsa City Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper decided to make it personal.

She promises to host a hamburger and hotdog celebration if the number of participants from her District 1 completing the program rises by 5 percent from last year. Plus, the readers with the highest number of books get a chance to throw a pie in her face. She gets to choose the pie.

Right now, the kids in her district have completed 45 percent of the reading goal.

Hall-Harper was approached with the idea by Keith Jemison, who has been the Rudisill Regional Library branch manager since 1979.

At first Jemison "thought about kissing a pig. I said, 'No, we aren't doing that,'" Hall-Harper recalled, laughing. "I thought this would be an opportunity to get behind something to improve student readership and produce stronger students in school.

"If kids get a love for reading at an early age, that will carry them on the rest of their lives. Reading truly is fundamental, and it is a joy."

Hall-Harper signed up for the library's adult program, which requires reading four books, and her summer list includes "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness" by Michelle Alexander and "The Prison Industrial Complex" by Angela Davis.

"I see this as community engagement and encouraging young people to read more," Hall-Harper said. "I love to read and love to help children utilize our library system."

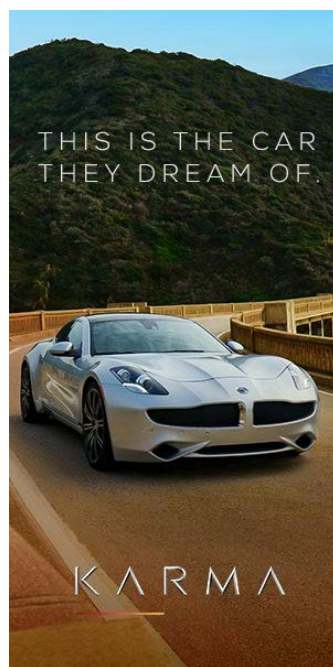
Library CEO Kim Johnson said the attention from city officials helps.

"The reading challenges brought forth by these public officials encourage the children of our community to continue to read and work hard throughout the summer," she said. "They also show them that someone cares and notices their achievements, rewarding their successes and cheering them on.

"We've seen participation numbers greatly improve at library locations supported by their local public official. When these community leaders take a stand to support summer reading, they stand for our children ... and our children stand to gain so much more than a new favorite book."

On the line: Motivated by Bynum and Hall-Harper, I contacted other Tulsa city councilors by email to see what they were willing to do. No councilor is going to kiss a pig.

District 8 Councilor Ben Kimbro kind of considered it.



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“I love pigs!” he stated. “I also love a literate society, and literacy is a primary building block to kids becoming successful, contributing adults. Certainly, I would kiss a pig, shave my head and beard (there’s not much of the former), dunk tank. ... I love a good joke, and if it would inspire young children to read, I would do about anything.”



Kimbro just finished Mary Beard’s “SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome” and recently dove into “Theft by Finding Diaries 1977-2002” by David Sedaris.

In considering rewards for kids, he may have been inspired by Sedaris’ humor.

“Thinking Jackson Pollack — the kids that complete the challenge get to load a brush with paint and sling it at me, thereby turning me into art, laughing at me and have a picture with me commemorating their achievement,” Kimbro said.

District 4 Councilor Blake Ewing said he was open to suggestions. He’s reading “Happy City” by Charles Montgomery and going through the comic book metaseries “The Stuff of Legend” by Mike Raicht and Brian Smith with his sons, ages 10 and 7.

Comic books, graphic novels and audio books absolutely count for summer reading.

Councilor Phil Lakin, of District 8, turns into a kid when coming up with challenge ideas. At first, he thought of scaling City Hall in a Batman suit to wash windows, but he probably wouldn’t get approval. Then, he offered to ride in an F-16 with the Air National Guard or go to the Tulsa Zoo to hold a snake or hop on a camel. Dressing up like a Greaser and drinking a soda at the Outsiders House was also an idea.

While Lakin joins in the fun spirit of the challenge, he’s also a prolific reader. He’s currently in the middle of three books — “Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton’s Doomed Campaign” by political journalists Amie Parnes and Jonathan Allen, “The Rise of Teddy Roosevelt (Series Book 1)” by Edmund Morris and the nonfiction mystery novel “Vicious Circle” by C.J. Box.

Most likely, Lakin will commit to trying out every piece of playground equipment when the Gathering Place park opens. That’s a lot of jumping, sliding, climbing, walking and jogging. I think he ought to do it in a Batman suit or Greaser get-up, though.

No matter what Lakin and other councilors land on, the point is to keep kids reading. Even if it means a little pie in the face.

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#### Tulsa City-County Library Summer Reading Program

Sign-ups are at any Tulsa County library branch.

Program continues through Aug. 5

No library card is required to participate.

**So far:** 25,539 children, 5,778 tweens and teens, and 8,561 adults have signed up for the summer reading program.

**For infants through students entering fifth grade:** Read eight books and

visit a library four times to earn a medal and book of coupons. For an additional 12 books (20 total), children get a bonus prize. Those completing the requirements will be entered into a drawing for prizes such as bicycles, memberships to area venues and gift cards.

**For tweens and teens:** Read six books for a coupon book and a wooden tower game. Those completing will be entered into a drawing for prizes such as laptops, tablets, headphones and gift cards.

**For adults (16 and older):** Can register online or in person. Read four books for discount coupons and a wooden game, while supplies last.

For more information, go to the Tulsa City-County Library website at: [www.tulsalibrary.org/summer](http://www.tulsalibrary.org/summer)



### News Columnist Ginnie Graham

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