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Students hit gold with book drive

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Eileen Marum/standard-times special Dartmouth Middle School students pose with a sign touting the number of books they collected for the Gifts to Give program.

By EILEEN MARUM
CONTRIBUTING WRITER
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DARTMOUTH — When it comes to collecting books, Dartmouth Middle School is in a class of its own.

"Students recently participated in a book drive for the RARE Olympics," said Laura Gardner, the school's librarian. RARE is an acronym for Respect, Accountable, Responsibility and Esteem.

And given the result — 3,255 gently used books hauled into school — everyone qualifies for a RARE gold medal.

"It was a highly competitive event," said Gardner. "Although

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competition was intense, the passion exhibited came from the knowledge that we would be helping a cause greater than ourselves."

The event took place over a one-week interval with two Grade 6 homerooms bringing in the most books at 475 each.

The sixth-graders then organized the books for shipping to the nonprofit Gifts to Give in New Bedford's South End, Gardner said.

Under the competition guidelines, homerooms received one point for every five books brought to school.

"All the books came from the students' homes," said Gardner. "Many of our kids are avid readers; we had picture books and easy readers and teen readers."

Some of the students continue to give even though the book drive has officially ended.

"I wanted to help people who can't afford books," said sixth-grader Sean Smialek, 12.

"I think all kids should be able to read," said sixth-grader Julia Pimentel, 11, adding she "also bought a couple of books" for the effort.

One recent weekend, students volunteered at Gifts to Give.

Noah Bachstein, 13, a seventh-grader, said, "I wanted to help kids who did not have as much as I have." Noah also donated many books he had read and had been stored away in the attic.

"I am really impressed by their generosity," Gardner said. "It was a big project that did a lot of good."

Among the beneficiaries was the Gomes School in New Bedford, which received 800 books from the Dartmouth Middle School's RARE Olympics.

Jim Stevens, CEO and founder of Gifts to Give, said he was pleasantly surprised when students collected and donated so many books.

"Yes, three thousand two hundred and fifty five," he said in an e-mail. "It was fierce competition between homerooms and they counted every single one of them — twice."

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