

2003 Civic Cup winner loves to see kids reading

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LAFAYETTE — Paul Hilliard loves to see a child with a book, and he's given thousands to elementary school students.

This is just one of the reasons he's been named this year's winner of the 2003 Civic Cup. He'll receive his award Wednesday night at the City Club in River Ranch subdivision.

While growing up in

Want to go?

The Civic Cup reception will be held at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 12 at City Club River Ranch. Tickets are \$30 per person and can be purchased at Lafayette Motors on Jefferson Street. Call (337) 233-0930.

rural Wisconsin, a one-room school house sparked Hilliard's interest in education, particularly

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Paul Hilliard - Kids reading

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reading. Over the past seven years, he's "adopted" several elementary schools in the area, and teachers say he's made a difference in some young lives.

Nancy Manuel, a reading specialist at Alice Boucher Elementary School, where 95 percent of students are considered "at risk," said test scores for the school are up, and she gives some of the credit to Hilliard's long-time involvement.

"He started with donating books at each grade for the literacy library," Manuel said. "Then he met us at the bookstore one year and had all the children choose a book. That one year he gave a book to

every child — about 400 in one year."

The kids at Alice Boucher need the extra encouragement, Manuel said, because many live with troubled families.

"Drugs — crack — is the problem," she said. "When you look at the population of kids affected by the drug use of their parents, it's one-third to 50 percent of the student population here. We get a lot of crack babies. It's very difficult on teachers to try and make up the educational slack."

But Hilliard keeps trying. He not only encourages the kids to read and learn, he helps make teachers' lives more pleasant by donating lunch on opening day and Teacher Appreciation Day, Manuel said.

And for six weeks, he donated food for the Prime Time Family Literacy Program at night,

when parents learn with their children. He's done the same for other schools, as well as augmenting salaries for tutors.

For a man who does big things, like donating \$3 million to the new University Art Museum, Hilliard seems to get a real kick out of the small things. He was visibly pleased as he walked into Alice Boucher last week and saw a banner by the door that read, "Congratulations, Mr. Hilliard. We are proud of you."

A few minutes later in the school library, he was delighted when he got the right answers from students in Penney Ruchere's kindergarten class about the colors on a book he held up.

The book, "Nobody Like You" by Jillian Harden, is about a clever fox. Manuel said the school is donating the

book to the library in Hilliard's honor.

"He is actively interested in what happens at this school," Manuel said. "Communities can take an active role in education. Not only to partner, but to follow up."

That's just what Hilliard does, said principal Madeleine McNulty.

"He will call every month or so and say, 'I haven't heard from you. What do you need?'" she said. "It's continuous. The relationship doesn't end because he's done something."

Helping at-risk kids takes time, and Hilliard has patience.

"Sometimes, the results are minimal, but you keep drilling when you get dry holes," he said.

Hilliard has also done a lot over the past six years for Ossun Elementary, near Cank-

ton, and Duson Elementary in Duson.

"He has always focused on reading to help our students increase their reading scores," said Ossun principal Rebecca LeMaire. "He's given us countless numbers of books, either as incentives for students or as classroom libraries."

Hilliard also brings lunch for teacher in-service days, she said, and bought sets of novels for classroom reading programs, even providing tote bags so students could take books home to read with their parents.

In addition to his involvement in education and many other causes, Hilliard has done a lot to help Lafayette Catholic Service Centers, said Executive Director Jay Branch. Hilliard is a past president of the managing council and now

serves as an adviser, particularly for renovation projects on several buildings.

"These buildings are serving the poor, the needy and the homeless," Branch said.

Branch said Hilliard is also known as "the peacemaker" because of his ability to stay cool, and was amazed at Hilliard's reaction when he learned the opening of the University Art Museum would be delayed.

"He contributed a significant amount of money and when the opening couldn't take place, people were getting bent out of shape, but not him," he said. "He looked outwardly for the solution while everyone else was still trying to figure out how to get mad. He's above all that. He doesn't get mad — he says, 'What can we do now?'"

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