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provides assistance to people with developmental disabilities with the everyday functions of life. An Open door has bridged the gap between our clients that we serve and the community since 2012. We look forward to continuing our dedication to fellow brothers and sisters with developmental disabilities and their families. Also, we look forward to establishing a solid ground in the community for the future generation.

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Deal near in Aldo plane crash lawsuit

By The Daily Press Staff

Ahead of final action in a lawsuit filed more than a year ago against Aldo Leopold High School by the parents of three students who died tragically in a 2014 plane crash, some details about a possible settlement between the parties have been released.

Ella Jaz Kirk, Michael Mahl and Ella Myers died in a plane crash on May 23, 2014, after the students, part of the Youth Conservation Corps Eco Monitoring program at Aldo Leopold Charter School, flew with private pilot Dr. Peter Hochla to view the Signal Fire burn scar. According to National Transportation Safety Board reports, visibility and weather conditions were not appropriate for the flight.

In the wake of the tragedy, family, friends, teachers, and the larger Grant County community mourned publicly with vigils, memorials both at the school and around town, and recent exhibi-

Snell teacher finalist for national award

By STEWART McCLINTIC
Daily Press Staff

Stepping into Cindy Lee's classroom at C.C. Snell Middle School as an adult is like stepping through a time warp, transporting one to grade school days in one of the most exciting classes — science. Lining the classroom walls are animals like geckos, mice, rats, turtles, fish, tarantulas and grasshoppers, as well as skulls and bones of deceased creatures.

Lee's classroom is alive, and that does not mean just the animals. The room itself is a hustle of students involved in different jobs and projects. Some take to horticulture, others feed the animals, put water in their bowls and check the pH levels of the aquariums, while others work on robotic prosthetic arms.

This is all part of Lee's curriculum, and is part of the reason she is a finalist this year for one of the most prestigious national awards for science education.

"The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and

tions of the art and other work produced by the three bright children.

But no amount of affection and support can make up for the death of a parent's child.

In late October 2014, family members of Ella, Michael and Ella filed suit against Aldo Leopold Charter School and the estate of Hochla.

And after more than a year, that lawsuit is drawing near, but has not reached, its end.

On Thursday, the families and the Davis Law Firm, their legal counsel, issued a press release announcing a settlement agreement reached between the students' families and the school. The release claims that "terms of the agreement will include assessment of the safety practices at the school, educating staff and faculty about the school's role in the incident and public acknowledgement."

While ALCS's legal counsel agrees that the two parties have come to an understanding, Jerry Walz, of Walz and Associates, said several legal steps are yet to be completed. He said the settlement agreement still has to be signed by the two parties and approved by the court before anything is official. "Ninety-nine percent of the time things will go the way they're agreed, but nothing is official yet," Walz said.

While Walz felt it was inappropriate to disclose information regarding the settlement, Ben Davis, of the Davis Law Firm, said the case has been resolved, and the settlement requires that the school publicly acknowledge its role in the plane crash.

That was certainly one of the goals of the parents' original lawsuit, which charges the school with negligence, negligent operation of an aircraft, loss of consortium and negligent infliction of emotional distress in its dealings with the pilot and flight that claimed the lives of the three children.

"Our objective has always been to help the school understand the chain of events leading up to this terrible tragedy," Patrice Mutchnick, parent of Ella Jaz Kirk, said in the release. "Where were the checks and balances that should

SILVER CITY DAILY PRESS

AND INDEPENDENT



(Press Staff Photo by Stewart McClintic)

Hurley Elementary School third-grade students Juan Jaurequi, left, and Nicholas Hernandez happily pick out books during Literacy Link-Leamos' 15th year of distributing books to the Grant County area.

Literacy group still giving free books

Students' eyes beamed on Friday at Hurley Elementary School as they lined up outside a classroom to get free books to take home with them.

The books, which will be distributed to hundreds of elementary school students over the next week, are provided by Literacy Link-Leamos three times a year to help improve literacy in children throughout Grant County.

Caroline Baldwin, founder of Literacy Link-Leamos, began the program in 2001.

"I started working on it in November of 2000. We really started working on it in 2001," Baldwin said. "I think in May of 2001 we had our first board of directors."

Since then, Baldwin said, LLL has received over 195,000 books from the Washington, D.C., pro-

gram FirstBook over its 15-year existence. She said Literacy Link gives away four books per child three times a year — once before summer break, once before fall break, and once before winter break.

Baldwin said the program is completely funded by grants from organizations such as the Freeport-McMoRan Foundation and the Silver City Rotary Club. Without these two organizations in particular, Baldwin said, the program would not have been able to continue for so long.

Also key to the distributions is FirstBook, which receives books for free from publishers and then gives them away to 501(c)3 organizations serving Title I, or low-

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 I'M RUNNING LATE AGAIN
 MY BOSS IS ON MY CASE
 TOTALLY FORGOT THAT MEETING
 WHO'S OUT SICK TODAY?
 WHICH ONE WAS TIOTROPIUM AGAIN?
 25MG RIGHT? OR IS IT 50?
 I STILL NEED TO EAT LUNCH
 WHO DO I CALL FOR THE
 OXYGEN REPLACEMENT?
 WHAT DO YOU MEAN
 YOU CAN'T MAKE IT?
 I'VE GOT TO RUN HOME
 FOR JUST A SECOND
 LET ME HELP YOU UP
 JUST TAKE IT SLOW
 OK I'LL GET YOUR
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Deal...

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have prevented the teacher putting the children on a plane with a non-commercial pilot in such bad weather? We hoped the school could take responsibility for their actions leading up to the crash, so they could learn from their mistakes and take steps to make sure this kind of thing never happens again.”

The school, which has repeatedly and publicly praised the three children, has remained silent about the lawsuit, as representatives said they felt was legally appropriate.

“I am pleased to confirm that the school has reached an agreement in principle with the families of Ella Myers, Michael Mahl, and Ella Jaz Kirk in settlement of the lawsuit brought by the families,” said ALCS

Director Eric Ahner. “Unfortunately, the settlement is not yet final, and I have been advised that we should not comment on it yet. It is my sincere hope that the settlement will contribute to the long and painful process of healing after the accident that took their children from them and from us.

“I regret that our inability to make public statements while the lawsuit has been active has hurt the families of Ella, Michael and Ella, and may have led to a loss of confidence in the school with some members of our school community. I look forward to releasing more information when it is appropriate to do so,” Ahner continued.

In addition to future announcements by the school, the settlement also reportedly includes a monetary aspect — in the maximum amount for this type of case,

according to Davis. That amount would be \$750,000, contrary to misinformation published by other media outlets, and will be split among the family members and their legal fees.

Even though the pain and loss is palpable among all involved, Davis said the settlement had been handled as amicably as possible in such circumstances.

“All three of the kids were very driven,” said John and Jenny Mahl, parents of Michael Mahl, in the release. “These three kids were rock stars; the amount of talent that they all had, music-wise, scholastically. It’s a horrific way that those kids died, but they lived life. They left an impact.”

More information and further statements are expected to become available following the finalization of the agreement.

Books...

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income, schools.

The only thing Baldwin has to pay for is the shipping and handling costs — which come nowhere close to the value of the books.

“It’s more than \$2 million worth of books, but the books are free. We have to pay for shipping,” Baldwin said. “When I started the program it was 25 cents a book, now it’s 55 to 75 cents per book.”

Although Baldwin’s organization has a board of direc-

tors — on which she serves, in addition to being a past president and the founder — she does most of the work herself, with the helpful hands of volunteers, of course.

Baldwin said her work is very rewarding.

“This little boy came up and said, ‘You guys deserve something.’ And he handed me this little ring,” she said. “It was probably a ring he got out of a candy, or those things you see in grocery stores. So I thanked him and put it on, and then he went off to pick

out his books.”

Baldwin said she has decided to write a thank-you card to the little boy and drop it off at his school, because his gift touched her so much.

Although she is almost a one-person show, Baldwin’s work does not go unappreciated.

Gerald Polk, a third-grade student at Hurley Elementary, said he really likes coming in every year and receiving free books, because he loves to read.

“This is fun and, I don’t know, these books are awesome,” he said.

Polk’s substitute third-grade teacher, Kaytie Marquez, said she thinks the program is wonderful for the children.

“Reading is awesome for the kids,” Marquez said. “It expands their knowledge.”

Cobre bus driver Leigh Reisch, who is also a volunteer for the distributions, said she really thinks the program is great as well.

“At the end of the distribution day, they’re boarding (the bus) and they’ve got loads of books, and they sit and they share and they read in the bus on the way home,” Reisch said.

— STEWART McCLINTIC



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