

Youth literature will come to life

PHELCC Celebrates Children's Week with a Party in the Park

By **KLINT LOWRY** | The Suncoast News

Published: February 1, 2012

SHADY HILLS - For 17 years organizations, corporations, state agencies, philanthropic and faith-based organizations across the state have observed Children's Week to celebrate families and to recognize and address issues pertaining to young children.



For the third straight year, The Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties Inc. will mark Children's Week by encouraging early childhood literacy by inviting families to step into their favorite fairy tales.

On Saturday, Crews Lake Wilderness Park, 18739 Crews Lake Drive, will be transformed into the Storybook Forest, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Thanks to sponsors including Target, Paul & Jerry's Storage and UPS, the coalition's Storybook Forest offers an afternoon of free, educational family fun, with interactive displays based on children's novels.

The displays will be populated by costumed characters that will tell stories and lead activities, including make-and-take projects at each display. Some of the stories featured in prior years have included "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Cat in the Hat," and "Where the Wild Things Are."

Clifford the Big Red Dog and McGruff the Crime Dog will make the rounds, as well.

Other activities will include a puppet show and a hula hoop fitness class for all ages, as well as music and free food.

The Central Pasco & Gulf Railroad, which operates a miniature train in the park on the second Saturday of each month, will fire up the locomotive for the occasion.

Early childhood educators in Pasco and Hernando counties will register children for voluntary pre-kindergarten. VPK is a free program for all children who turn 4 years old on or before Sept. 1 of the program year.

There are no income requirements for VPK. To enroll, parents must bring proof of age, such as a birth certificate for each child, as well as proof of residence. For more information about accepted documents or to view the VPK application, visit www.phelc.org/vpk.html.

For more information about this year's Storybook Forest, contact Sharon Hayes at (727) 233-8291 or s.hayes@phelc.org.

For more information about the Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, visit www.phelc.org.