



Courtesy photo

Freda Tao (left), who lost her son Bentley to a brain tumor last November, poses with his twin surviving brother Austin and Barbara Saltzman of The Jester & Pharley Phund.

## Students learn about giving through reading

By Shel Segal  
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As a way to remember their fallen classmate, sixth graders at Sunkist Elementary School read more than 24,000 pages in two weeks in an effort to donate books and dolls to Children's Hospital of Orange County. They were honored with an assembly on Monday.

Barbara Saltzman, executive director of the "Jester & Pharley Phund," an organization that helped sponsor the program, said it was very beneficial to all involved.

"What we are doing is sixth grade classmates of Bentley Tao conducted a read-a-thon in his memory to benefit patients at CHOC," Saltzman said.

Bentley, a sixth grader, tragically died in November of cancer, Saltzman said.

The students read the book "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle," which was written and illustrated by Saltzman's late son David Saltzman, who while attending Yale University wrote the book as his senior project before passing away on March 2, 1990 of Hodgkin's disease.

The family published the book in 1995 and it became a *New York Times* best seller.

"When I became aware of Bentley's situation, I sent him a Jester book and doll to help him and his family keep their spirits up," said Saltzman, who added the event was sponsored by a woman who lives in Virginia. "After Bentley's death, his mother, Freda Tao, suggested Sunkist sixth graders might want to honor his memory by participating in Jester & Pharley (Jester's friend)."

The students overwhelmed Saltzman with their reading, she said.

"The students were asked to read as much as they could in 12 days," she said. "They read more than 24,000 pages. Their reading has generated the donation of 35 books and 35 dolls to CHOC."

"And as part of the sponsorship, Jester books were also donated to the library and to all sixth grade classes here at Sunkist."

Sunkist Principal Beatrice Kirkman said the read a thon was really important to the students.

"We wanted the children to be able to focus on something positive to the community," she said. "This has

allowed out children to focus their energy and donate to CHOC through the Jester foundation."

Freda Tao, mother of Bentley and his twin surviving brother Austin, said she was very grateful for the event.

"It helps me to remember Bentley and honor him," she said. "It might help to raise awareness about pediatric brain tumors so more people can do more to help with their resources."

Linda Cox of CHOC said the books should help some of the patients at the hospital.

"We try to get all kids who come through CHOC to enjoy the fun of reading," Cox said. "This will be given to the kids who are inpatient. These gifts will help those kids get their laughter back."

Sixth grader Amber Denkers, 11, said she really enjoyed the event.

"I love to read," she said. "We were honoring our classmate Bentley. Even though I didn't know him that well, I knew his brother. I still considered him as a friend. He was nice."

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