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■ PORTAGE SCHOOL DIVISION

Indigo Chapters grant helps schools get new books

BY JOSH HARRIS
Special to the Daily Graphic

North Memorial School principal Joanne Bell attended Thursday night's Portage la Prairie School Division board meeting, and spoke on the Indigo Chapters grant her school received in 2008.

Administrators and trustees viewed a short DVD on the Indigo grant before Bell took the time to show the board a number of books already purchased through the program. She said Indigo's overall goal is to provide money for schools competing to secure funding for their dying libraries, adding the grant has opened new doors for the school to purchase high quality books that are relevant and up to date.

"The grant has enabled us to purchase hundreds, even thousands of books, all in great condition. We were able to get new atlases (and) they even have Nunavut in them, which is great," explained Bell. "It's a fabulous opportunity to be able to offer our kids the very best there is in literature, and through this Indigo grant, we've been able to do that."

Bell said the application process was long, but staff and students are thrilled to have access to the amount of books the funding will provide. She noted the school has chosen different areas of focus for each year's annual \$12,000 donation.

Bell said the school received a grant of \$36,000 over three years, with this year being the second year. She added the school is given 10 per cent of the funds in cash. In return, the school needs to show Indigo where and how the money is spent. Bell feels the program is all about making reading more accessible to elementary school students.

"We discarded all the books in our library that were pre-1980 (and) gave them to kids. Even after

discarding all the old books, the grant has helped us expand our library. We've also installed kid-friendly shelving," noted Bell. "We've been able to buy books that are more sustainable, as well as beautiful books that can open a student's eyes to the world."

Federal funding currently available for these resources was outlined during the presentation, and amounts to less than one-third of a book per child.

Bell notes part of the criteria in accepting the grant was making the public aware of the Indigo grant. Each year, Indigo provides 10 schools across the country with \$150,000 each to completely revamp their libraries, while a number of schools are provided with a smaller amount of funds for the same reason.

A panel of six people, including Indigo president and chief executive officer Heather Reisman, make up the Love of Reading Advisory Committee, which is the board responsible for approving the applications.

"I don't think anyone, not our political leaders, not even the parents, really know how bad it is," Reisman explained during the short DVD viewed by trustees. "The task is to fund as many schools as we can with the funding we have, but our goal is to make the crisis so clear that it won't continue to be ignored by our society It is nothing short of a travesty and an injustice to rob these kids of a future."

Bell added the school is grateful for the funds and was ecstatic when they were first told their application had been approved.

She hopes the funds will help the school continue to expand its literacy programs and provide students with the educational materials they deserve.

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