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HOLY READING! Nonprofit donates comics to get kids to read

BY KYLI SINGH

WHAM! BAM! POW! KABOOM! These vivid, eye-popping words delight comic book lovers, many of them children.

On Friday mornings, three adult volunteers passionate about this art form sit outside Starbucks at Sunset Place and screen piles of donated comic books to make sure they are suitable for giving to kids to encourage reading.

“We started this about two years ago. I had a bunch of comic books lying around my house I wanted to get rid of,” said Socrates Alvarez, ComicED founder and executive director.

With his own collection of comics, small start-up grants, donations, fundraising events and sponsors, ComicED was launched successfully in August 2008.

Designed to serve the youngsters in Miami-Dade County, Alvarez said his nonprofit organization provides free comic books, accompanied by reading and drawing events at local community centers, after-school programs and youth shelters.

“Comic books are colorful, bright and wonderful stories that will increase a child’s imagination,” said Brian Bernard, a ComicED volunteer. “It’s a great source of material to get kids to start reading. A lot of people see comic books as goofy and immature but I disagree. It’s for all ages.”

The nonprofit’s mission is to encourage early and habitual reading in young people, Alvarez said. The group’s reading comprehension quizzes and drawing worksheets encourage children to engage in critical thinking and establish creative thinking skills.

“Hopefully, a kid realizes that one day he can go whenever to the community center and read his favorite comics,” he said. “One day that kid can grow up and take his child to the community center and the trend will continue. It develops lateral literacy, which is

lifelong reading.”

The nonprofit also travels to other spots to encourage children to read. Last Saturday, Duane Carthen found comic books for a dime apiece at the Headliners Barbershop on Grand Avenue in Coconut Grove – courtesy of ComicEd.

Recently the group started a new program called “Letters for Comics.” Any child in Miami-Dade County who sends in a letter will receive a free comic book featuring their favorite superhero.

Their one-page letter must include their name, age, a brief description of their neighborhood and their favorite subject in school. The kids must also write about their favorite superhero or super heroine and why they like him or her. The letter can be sent to Letters for Comics, ComicED, P.O. Box 190642, Miami Beach, FL 33119.

Alvarez said writing the letter gives children an opportunity to express their thoughts on paper instead of communicating through e-mails and text messages.

“I didn’t know how to write a letter until I was in college. This will help kids practice the structure of a letter and they’ll have a chance to learn,” Alvarez said.

ComicED also provides a biweekly comic book rotation to two youth centers in Liberty City, as well as the Miami Bridge Youth and Family Services and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami-Dade.

“We’re going to put out a comic book that will hopefully help give us a stable income,” Alvarez said of the group’s future plans.

That could be the educational equivalent of leaping tall buildings in a single bound.