

Military OneSource Podcast — 2022 Summer Reading Program

Episode transcript:

Intro voiceover:

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Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. Bruce Moody with you here today. It is summertime, which, for the purpose of today's episode, we're going to characterize as that period of time between one school year and another. It's summer vacation, also known as that time when parents would love to get a book in the hands of their kids. So, with that, we're going to talk about the MWR Summer Reading Program. And, to do that, let's bring in our guest, Brandy Stevens, manager of the Navy general library program. Brandy, it's great to have you with us. Hello.

Brandy Stevens:

Hello, Bruce. Thank you for having me on today.

Bruce:

It's good to have you with us. In introducing you, we're saying that you're from the Navy, but why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and what it is that you do for the summer reading program?

Brandy:

Well, as you stated, I am the program manager for the Navy MWR library program, and, for the MWR joint services summer reading program, we coordinate the program for all of the other services and execute the program for them through contracting. We handle the budgets and financing, and we coordinate pretty much from a top-down level.

Bruce:

OK, all right. Well, you're Navy, I'm retired Navy, but we won't tell any sea stories today, because today's episode is all about stuff for all the services, all the families, in all the branches. Let's just get right to it. The MWR summer reading program. Why don't you tell us a little bit about what this program is?

Brandy:

The MWR summer reading program is designed for military community readers. The MWR reading program started in 2010, when the joint services, all of the libraries, got together and they wanted to combine resources to implement something a little bit more sustainable for each of their services. The first program launched that summer with the theme “Voyage to Book Island,” and the rest is pretty much history.

Bruce:

You mentioned the themes. These themes change from year to year. How does that come about?

Brandy:

The themes are selected by a group of librarians. The program we use is called iRead, and it's a committee from the Illinois Library Association, a team of librarians. There are about 15 of them that get together. They're programming librarians, children's librarians, and they select a theme each year. They start three years before the theme that they actually generate is used, and they have criteria that they use whenever they select a theme. They would like the theme to be universal and promote reading, be focused interpretation, something that is universal for all of all readers. They would like the readers to be engaged in what the theme is and be able to relate to it.

Bruce:

That's really interesting. I honestly did not know how much work and preparation, frankly, how much thought goes into the themes and how this comes around. So, is this program just for kids or can adults participate?

Brandy:

The program is for all ages, from our infants all the way up through ... We have a lot of retirees who love our program.

Bruce:

So, it's the summer reading program, but you really don't specify what to read. Are we talking just books or are we talking about maybe also newspapers, magazines, maybe audio books? What counts in the summer reading program?

Brandy:

Bruce, everything counts for the summer reading program, and as technology changes, we've had to change how we count our challenges. Every year we have challenges. Sometimes they're how many minutes can be read. Right now, that's what the challenges are, how many minutes a person can read. If you are reading a menu online or a news article online, or a book or a newspaper magazine, any reading counts.

Bruce:

That's really interesting. I spend way too much time reading tweets, so to kind of break my brain from FOMO, I'm currently working my way through a 1,300-page book. I'm about a third of the

way through. So, I'm glad to understand the way in which you can track your reading because it's very likely that my sum total otherwise would just be one. For this program, how many folks do you have enrolled this summer?

Brandy:

Right now, we have more than 60,000 readers enrolled, and I looked at some data because I was getting ready for our podcast today, and our current number of minutes read is more 47 million.

Bruce:

That just blows me away. That's really awesome. OK, so 47 million minutes of reading has already happened. Can people still join the program or is it too late to join?

Brandy:

No, the program is ... it's designed to last a minimum of six weeks, but it is installation based. The installations select the time that they have their summer reading program. So, they can do it for six weeks. Some installations do it for 10 weeks. Some do it for eight. And it's not too late to join. Many installations are just getting started and we have a website that we can direct people to get more information about what installations are participating. If a reader wants to join our summer reading program and they're not close to a military installation, we are also offering a DOD virtual summer reading program, and that information will also be available on the website that we hand out.

Bruce:

That's really good information because people who may be in the Guard or reserves may be some distance away from ... sometimes time zones away from the installation that they are assigned to or connected to. So that's really good information. It's a link, we'll put it in the program notes of this episode and people can click through. Generally speaking, what are people going to do when they sign up, and how do you track what is read or how many minutes are read?

Brandy:

So, the patrons track their own minutes. They use the website that we will push out to our readers who want to participate and they sign up through that website and they track their own reading minutes.

Bruce:

This is great. So, reading is great in itself. I wonder if there are any incentives for tracking your reading in the summer reading program? Are there incentives, are there prizes? What happens after you've logged in your time?

Brandy:

Well, as a librarian, I always like to say that reading is its own reward, but the incentives we offer are a lot of fun and they're related to the subject of reading and specifically to the theme that we offer each year. Some of the incentives we offer are things like Bluetooth speakers, toys

for children that are related to the theme, T-shirts and water bottles, coloring materials. We've also offered baby blankets. Our incentives are pretty amazing.

Bruce:

Sounds really great. Brandy, anything else on the summer reading program before we wrap up?

Brandy:

I do want to say that every installation picks their own challenges, so you're welcome to join the virtual program as well as your installation's program. Our DOD virtual program has a challenge where we're trying to have our readers read a million minutes in the time length that we have allotted for. I checked that and we're now at over 600,000 minutes. I want to thank our readers for helping us. It looks like we're going to meet our goal this year and that's really great news.

Bruce:

A lot of good memories. Growing up, I was taken by my parents, by my school, to the library routinely, and I have a real affection for libraries and for reading, of course. Brandy, thank you so much for joining us. Brandy is a manager of the Navy general library program with us today to talk about MWR's summer reading program.

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