

'Story walk' offers fun take on reading, exercise

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ALTO – What's black and white and read all over? An innovative pilot known as the StoryWalk Pop-Up program that combines a joy of reading with outdoor exercise, launched Aug. 17 at the Alto Youth Baseball/Softball fields.

With oversized pages of "Pete the Cat" secured to signs scattered along an impromptu path, families were able to wind their way through the story literally and physically. Local city councilman Luke Johnson described the program as something "aimed at enhancing our town" while helping improve quality of life for residents by creating unique opportunities for exercise.

His hope is that the program helps kick off momentum that leads to more recreational programs for its residents. "Just because we live in a little area, doesn't mean you don't deserve nice things," he said.

In launching the inaugural program, the City of Alto partnered with Texas AgriLife Extension through its WOW-E (Working on Wellness Environment) program, along with Communities Unlimited, which helped

who, in the past, served as a library director in Rusk, it's a chance to promote literacy while offering a way to help tackle a high obesity rate in the county. "Cherokee County has a 40 percent obesity rate," she said.

an "excellent" idea that her family was excited about.

"We just moved here four years ago, and this is the first thing of its kind that we have come to, so it's very exciting," Scott said. "We always want to do things that involve getting out and having physical activities for the kids."

The story walk is meant to create awareness of programs and activities possible for Alto's 1,062 residents, as city leaders develop city parks, along with an improved sidewalk system, Johnson said.

"It will make it easier to walk to town, it will help make people healthier, and it makes the town more economically viable," he said. "It will give equity, because a lot of people can't drive. And to walk? You've got to have a place to walk to. That's why we're doing the parks first, and then we're going to fill in the sidewalk network, a biking trail network."

The pop-up event is "something that is low-threshold

that we could get started, and we've had a lot of really good feedback prior to this Saturday morning," he said. Thus far, local residents have expressed great interest in the program, which is next planned for the first Saturday in September.

"One of the AgriLife reps said that on average, they have towns that are about 14,000 population and they struggle to get people to even

respond," he said. "As of yesterday (Aug. 16), we had 176 online responses, and another 30-40 on paper."

While Alto's first pop-up story event was geared to younger readers, organizers pointed out that the format can be adapted for readers of all ages, incorporating various types of content, from literature to local history, offering endless possibilities.



Luke Johnson, left, answers questions about Saturday's Pop-up StoryWalk in Alto. Cherokeean Herald photo

ensure the city has been able to access needed resources. For Amy Walley, the Cherokee County Family/Community Health extension agent

Kari Scott – who, with husband Tad, is parent to three sons between the ages of 4 and 8 – called the program



A quartet of young girls follow the adventures of Pete the Cat. Courtesy photo



Tad (right) and wife Kari Scott visit with Luke Johnson as their two older sons pour over information about an inaugural StoryWalk program. Cherokeean Herald photo



Mom (center) fills out a survey about a pop-up StoryWalk held in Alto Saturday, with a little help from her guys. Cherokeean Herald photo



Six-year-old Sut Scott laughs at the antics of Pete the Cat displayed as part of a StoryWalk held Aug. 17, 2024, in Alto. Cherokeean Herald photo