

AlphaSkills, Inc. In The Spotlight



Special Photo

By: TANYA KIRKPATRICK

AlphaSkills, Inc. has truly been in the spotlight for the past couple of months.

First, the company, founded in Twiggs County by Fleming and Sarah Beck Hawthorne, was highlighted as the "Business of the Month" during the Twiggs

County Chamber of Commerce meeting in April. Then, on May 6th in Atlanta, Dr. Sarah Hawthorne received the "Education Leadership Award" presented by Communities in Schools of Georgia.

Celebrating its 15th year in

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business, AlphaSkills was founded to provide staff development for administrators and teachers in the art of teaching young children, kindergarten through third grade, to read.

Research supports that these are the critical years for learning to read in order to be successful in school and life.

Soon, Dr. Hawthorne wrote a reading curriculum for this purpose, entitled "Read with Sarah", and for these identified grades.

However, success by schools using these materials brought requests that the curriculum be written for all grade levels at the elementary and secondary levels.

Today, "Read with Sarah" has extended from kindergarten through ninth grades with seven large volumes of lesson plans matched to fiction and non-fiction texts, including science, social studies, and math.

In addition, there are over 100 "Independent Assessment Notebooks" matching these texts and lesson plans to extend learning by students in the areas of vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. All materials have been matched through the years to state standards and now match the Common Core Standards.

The materials, which are based on the most current research in reading education, were submitted to Florida State University for

review and received an unusually high score of 95 percent in reading comprehension.

In addition, a federal review team in one school using the program for their school improvement grant stated in a report that "Read with Sarah" is truly a reading model, not just a program.

This statement was based on the fact that AlphaSkills consultants provide initial training for teachers and administrators, demonstration lessons in the classroom for teachers with their students, side by side supportive observations of teachers using the materials, and continued support to monitor student progress and make adjustments, as needed. Often, this support continues in schools for three years or more.

National and state recognition and awards have come to several schools working with AlphaSkills training and materials. Three Georgia schools have been named National Title I Distinguished Schools and another one was named a 2012 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence.

One school in South Carolina recently earned two Palmetto Gold Awards for great gains and numerous other schools have been named state Title I Distinguished Schools and have earned awards from the Governor's Office and Georgia Department of Education recognition of schools showing significant

improvement.

Today, AlphaSkills has materials developed for babies through ninth grade. Their AlphaSkills Pre-K Thematic Units and Family Literacy Kits are one of 13 approved programs by Bright from the Start for use in Pre-K programs in Georgia. This approval followed a thorough review by the University of Texas.

Several Early Learning Centers, including some Family and Children Services sites, are using the company's training and materials for staff members and parents of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers.

The newest venture for AlphaSkills is a homeschooling program, "One to One Teaching", that allows parents to rent materials using PayPal on their website at www.alphaskills.com. Materials matching the grade level of the students are shipped throughout the United States with cost included in the monthly fee. Parents have been excited by the flexibility and ease of use as well as the high quality materials.

How has AlphaSkills continued its growth in a period of economic decline? Fleming and Sarah Hawthorne attribute their growth to listening to and striving to meet the needs of those they serve.

Dr. Sarah, as she is fondly referred to by the administrators, teachers, and students she works with, believes,

"You must be genuine and truly listen to what is needed by those you work with in the schools. Teachers want to know that you are willing to actually model teaching the students who are struggling as well as those who are excelling. These same teachers appreciate being given feedback about the things they are doing correctly in the classroom and ideas for improvement. Administrators appreciate growing in their roles of monitoring a school wide reading effort. I believe that these are the actions that set us apart from other companies."

Fleming, on the other hand, does not hesitate to point out that his wife is the exceptional educator who sets their company apart. He states, "She has been a Georgia Teacher of the Year, Runner-up, a

Georgia Reading Teacher of the Year, and was named in both Outstanding Young Women of America and Who's Who in America. Her leadership skills extend to serving as president of the Georgia International Reading Association and Georgia Teachers of the Year Association. In addition, she is Vice Chair of Central Georgia Technical College Board of Directors as well as on several other boards. She has a God given talent to teach others and to write outstanding curriculum and she uses those talents extremely well each day in many schools in the Southeast."

Thus, the Twiggs Chamber of Commerce wisely recognized and honored the good work of AlphaSkills, Inc. which began and continues to grow right here in Jeffersonville!