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JORDAN WRESTLERS PIN DOWN BOOKS

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Athletes' drive is on its way to netting 3,000 reads

Want to help?

To make a donation, call Philip Davanzo at 560-3912, ext. 12248.

BY JOE JOHNSON

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DURHAM -- When Jordan wrestling coach Philip Davanzo last visited his hometown back in New York, little did he realize that the seeds for a public service project were going to be planted. But as he stepped over boxes of books and stared at shelves lined with tomes untouched since he left to attend N.C. State University, Davanzo said the idea of donating them to a literacy cause popped into his mind.

"There were thousands of books at home just sitting there," Davanzo said. "Giving them to someone who wants to read seemed like the best thing to do."

This fall Davanzo brought the idea of a book drive to his wrestling team. For him, it would provide a pair of life lessons for his team. First, they would get the character-building exercise of helping others through public service. And second, they would see the benefit of their service locally.

Davanzo said he'd considered raising money for various charitable organizations but reconsidered in light of the present tough economic conditions. And he wanted the project to have a local impact.

"We're so quick to donate to overseas charities," Davanzo said. "Why can't we take care of things locally? Right now it's tough to ask for money donations but everybody probably has books they haven't touched in a long time."

This type of charitable drive actually provides benefits for the donors as well as the recipients. Donors get back some space and the recipients get the gift of a good story or two or three or four.

The Jordan drive is actually part of a larger project headed up by the academic support program in the NCSU athletics department. Davanzo, who wrestled for the Wolfpack, will be funneling the books collected to NCSU, where they will be distributed across the Triangle to reading rooms at clinics and treatment facilities.

Davanzo set a goal of 1,200 books for his squad. The team came through in the first week and Davanzo said he was overwhelmed by the positive response. The wrestling team is well on its way to collecting 3,000 books now. The wrestling team also issued a challenge to Jordan's other athletic teams to collect books, and Davanzo said they are coming through. Davanzo said he hopes to deliver close to 5,000 books on Dec. 12.

"These books will go to people who want to read," Davanzo said.

The wrestlers tapped many sources to collect the books. They culled their own collections. They asked neighbors. And some even cleaned out their basements.

"I thought it was a neat idea," said sophomore Donovan Heath, who alone has collected about 150 books for donation. "I had a lot of books lying around, and I went ahead and gave them to the project."

Another sophomore who has collected just as many books said those donated have ranged from advanced adult reading all the way down to children's books.

Junior Bobby Davis has had a special relationship with books since his mother was a librarian with the Durham Public Library. He said his family's book collection needed to be downsized and donating the extra books would help others who wanted to read.

"My basement is filled with books," Davis said. "This is a good way to get rid of some and to give us more space."

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