

# Easy as A-B-C

*September 20, 2003*

UPPER MERION - Jane Hileman is an unusual corporate leader.

She believes that increasing the number of youthful, enthusiastic readers will improve.

"Our goal is to change the world," said the owner of the 100 Book Challenge Company in Upper Merion. "We want to help schools rethink what makes successful learners."

Hileman's company at 421 Fehleley Dr. specializes in building classroom libraries of books for schoolchildren to read from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The fiction and non-fiction books are tailored to the grade and reading levels of individual students.

"Children find their own reading level by picking out the books and reading them," she said. "100 Book Challenge uses the kids' energy."

Hileman used an early version of the 100 Book Challenge program in the Philadelphia Reads program where she was an associate director from 1998 to 2001. The Able Foundation of Baltimore liked the 100 Book Challenge program so much they signed a \$150,000 contract in the summer of 1998 to use it in the Baltimore Superkids Camp.

That initial contract jumpstarted the company, Hileman said. In the fall of 1998, 10 Baltimore schools started using the book program in a pilot program.

Now 45 school districts in 16 states use 100 Book Challenge for their students. The program puts 300 books in color-coded baskets into each classroom along with student skill cards, teaching materials for instructors and prizes to reward students for reading achievement.

The company charges \$3,500 per classroom for the book program.

In the past two years the company has boosted employment from nine workers to 35 workers as revenues grew to \$4.6 million in 2002.

Hileman attributed the increase in business to larger reorders from existing clients and the addition of three school districts in 2002. The company signed up 29

schools in Jersey City, N.J., 14 schools in Harrisburg and five schools in York during the past year.

Hileman started her educational career at Roberto Clemente Middle School in Philadelphia as a reading specialist from 1973 to 1983. She worked for 10 years at the University of Pennsylvania as an instructor of student teachers. She supervised her students while they taught at Overbrook High School.

The Essex Elementary School in Akron, Ohio started using the reading program in 2000. The percentage of students at the school passing the reading portion of the Ohio Proficiency Test increased from 37 percent in 2000 to 63 percent in 2002.

Two Philadelphia elementary schools increased their mean PSSA reading scores after implementing 100 Book Challenge in 1997. Morris Elementary School boosted its PSSA reading scores from 1050 in 1997 to 1180 in 2001 while Kearny Elementary School boosted its PSSA reading scores from 1070 to 1280.

After students at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Levittown, Bucks County, started using the program in the fall of 1999 the percentage of students reading on or above grade level increased from 20 percent (1999) to between 66 percent (2000) and 76 percent (2002).

"We have 100,000 children participating in our program," said Hileman. "Our goal is to have 1 million children."

Carl Rotenberg can be reached at [crotenberg@timesherald.com](mailto:crotenberg@timesherald.com) or 610-272-2500, ext. 350.