



**Uniting Cultures to Celebrate the
Mosaic of our Community**

218 Main St., Fort Morgan, CO 80701

“Gift of reading” being given to all Fort Morgan, CO 4-year-olds; OneMorgan County, Cargill, Leprino Foods, The Colorado Health Foundation join forces to support literacy

***Growing Readers program to make Fort Morgan the first community in the U.S. with
100 percent of children entering kindergarten having a 100-book home library***

FORT MORGAN, COLORADO (November 26, 2018) – Located along I-76, 80 miles east of Denver, Fort Morgan, Colorado, is a special place. Founded in the 1880s as a military outpost on the Overland Trail, it has recently become one of the State’s most diverse communities. Its current residents, totaling approximately 11,300, love its size, safety, and economic opportunities. The key to sustaining this thriving rural community is to grow talented youth and a key to developing talented youth is ensuring that every child starts kindergarten fully prepared to learn. This begins at an early age.

To ensure Fort Morgan’s entire population of 250 four-year-olds have the best possible preparation for kindergarten and beyond, OneMorgan County, a local non-profit, is working with city officials, and two of the town’s largest employers – Cargill and Leprino Foods – and Colorado Health Foundation to deliver the gift of reading. The whole community will be invited during the holidays to participate in a crowdfunding effort to round out the funding of the project. The groundbreaking *Fort Morgan Growing Readers* program will ensure that every Fort Morgan four-year-old receives four books each week, from January into July 2019, resulting in personal home libraries of over 100 books.

According to Fort Collins, Colorado-based Unite for Literacy, LLC, supplier of the books as well as associated reading programs for the children and their parents, Fort Morgan will become the first U.S. community in which the entire population of four-year-olds have personal libraries with 100+ books and community-based reading instruction.

“Children who enter school with early literacy skills are more likely than their peers to experience later academic success, attain higher levels of education and secure better employment,” said Susana Guardado, Director of OneMorgan County. “The result is a stronger community for everyone, so the goal of the *Fort Morgan Growing Readers* program is to make sure every Fort Morgan child enters kindergarten motivated and ready to learn. We are also excited to share with our community the Unite for Literacy free online library that has over 400 books which are narrated in up to 40 languages to support families that are English language learners.”

The program’s strength lies in the enthusiastic participation of key community stakeholders. “By providing this gift of reading, we’re elevating Fort Morgan to model city status,” explained Dr. Rena Frasco, Assistant Superintendent of Morgan Re-E School District. “Our *Growing Readers* program is a broad community effort lead by OneMorgan County, which will integrate resources from key stakeholders including the



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community's public, private, and civic sectors. Our goal is to generate a measurable improvement in the 'day one' readiness for Fort Morgan's August 2019 kindergarten class.

"The long-term desired impact is the creation of a robust culture of reading at the individual, family, classroom, and community levels, which leads to reducing achievement gaps and improving graduation rates for people who will contribute to a more vibrant, attractive, and sustainable community."

The community's largest employer, Cargill Protein, took the lead as *Fort Morgan Growing Readers*' earliest sponsor. "We celebrate and embrace the diversity of our beef plant's 2,100 employees," said Tyler Luft, Cargill's Fort Morgan plant general manager. "The cultures of more than 20 nations, including the United States, are represented by our team members, yet they all share the common desire to contribute to society. Part of that focus is on ensuring their children have educational opportunities like the *Growing Readers* program. Supporting programs such as *Growing Readers* is one way Cargill helps people and communities thrive, which is why we are proud to be part of this initiative."

"Our intention is to engage with the community where we live and work and make a positive lasting impact," stated Leprino Food Company's Fort Morgan Plant Manager David Merriam. "Leprino Foods has a sizable business footprint in Fort Morgan with 375 employees. With the support of the Leprino Foods Company Foundation, we are proud to be part of this worthwhile program and bring to fruition a lifetime love of reading through the gift of books."

"The residents of Fort Morgan have been working tirelessly for nearly a decade to strengthen the bonds between its newcomer and receiving communities," said Eric Ishiwata of The Pulley System and Colorado State University. "Part of what makes *Fort Morgan Growing Readers* so exciting is that it builds upon the intercultural community building efforts initiated back in 2008 by a handful of rather unsung local heroes. This community-based reading program honors their hard work and represents a high-water mark for Fort Morgan in that it is truly inclusive in terms of its participants, partners, and sponsors."

ABOUT ONEMORGAN COUNTY

OneMorgan County is a 501(c)(3) that fosters relationships among diverse people and organizations to strengthen the well-being, safety, and cohesive nature of our community.

Over the past several years, Morgan County's increasingly diverse population has led to a corresponding need for community cohesion initiatives, which OMC provides through its programs. For OMC, community cohesion initiatives contribute to the overall climate of inclusiveness in Morgan County and demonstrate that there are mechanisms for building bridges to create and sustain productive intercultural interaction, positive dialogue, relationship-building, intercultural communication skills training, and access to accurate information and services.

ABOUT CARGILL

Cargill's 155,000 employees across 70 countries work relentlessly to achieve our purpose of nourishing the world in a safe, responsible and sustainable way. Every day, we connect farmers with markets, customers with ingredients, and people and animals with the food they need to thrive.



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We combine 153 years of experience with new technologies and insights to serve as a trusted partner for food, agriculture, financial and industrial customers in more than 125 countries. Side-by-side, we are building a stronger, sustainable future for agriculture.

ABOUT LEPRINO FOODS

The Leprino Foods Company Foundation was established in 2015 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to help support and advance the success of the communities where we live and operate. Our Mission is to drive positive change in our communities by leveraging time, talent and resources to improve Education, Nutrition, Fitness and Local Needs. In Fort Morgan, we make an impact through more than 375 dedicated employees.

ABOUT COLORADO HEALTH

[Colorado Health Foundation](#) is bringing health in reach for all Coloradans by engaging closely with communities across the state through investing, policy advocacy, learning and capacity building. For more information, please visit www.coloradohealth.org.

ABOUT THE PULLEY SYSTEM

The Pulley System is a 501(c)(3), based in Fort Collins, Colorado. Operating as a streamlined, nimble organization, we work to lighten the loads for nonprofit, civic, and public entities by providing the technical support and services needed to build, implement, and evaluate sustainable, community-based programs. Our work specializes in collaborating with historically marginalized residents; specifically, low-income women and children from native, immigrant, and refugee communities.

ABOUT UNITE FOR LITERACY

Unite for Literacy is a for-profit social enterprise that partners with nonprofit organizations, businesses and philanthropic funders to change the literacy landscape of communities. We do this by engaging families with our free digital library and supportive messaging about the importance of developing a daily habit of self-determined reading. Our platform allows for localized and relevant content creation, multiple language narrations and scalable distribution. It also provides children, parents and educators free access to culturally and linguistically relevant books to help ensure low-income and bilingual children enter kindergarten prepared to learn.

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Fort Morgan Growing Readers Program Fact Sheet

Who: OneMorgan County
City of Fort Morgan
Cargill
Colorado Health Foundation
Leprino Foods
Unit for Literacy
Families of all 4-year-old children in Fort Morgan, Colorado

What: OneMorgan County is partnering with Cargill, Leprino Foods, Colorado Health Foundation and the City of Fort Morgan to provide the “gift of reading” to all 4-year-olds in Fort Morgan. This will make Fort Morgan the first U.S. city to ensure that all 4-year-olds have a library of 100 books and reading instruction to give them a head start on preschool and beyond. The January launch has already garnered broad community support from the community’s public, private and civic sectors. The *Fort Morgan Growing Readers* project leverages the library of children’s books created and distributed by Unite for Literacy, LLC.

The *Fort Morgan Growing Readers* will print and distribute 100 culturally and linguistically relevant children’s books to every 4-year-old in Fort Morgan. It also will make Fort Morgan families aware of Unite for Literacy’s free digital library which contains over 400 books narrated in up to 40 languages for emerging readers. Non-fiction books are the main focus, with the intent to capture family, neighborhood, and community life, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) topics. Furthermore, the project will engage with families at community events to share with them research-based innovative practices, learning tools and messaging about how and why to regularly read with their children. Families that want to sign up to be part of the project should contact OneMorgan County.

OneMorgan County will round out the fundraising process with a crowdfunding initiative that invites the whole community and others outside the community to participate in raising the remaining funds to support the project.

When: Announcement: November 2018
Book deliveries: weekly from January to July 2019 (4 books per week)



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Beginning in January 2019, the project will:

- Distribute a personal library of 100 children's books to every 4-year-old in Fort Morgan, children who will begin kindergarten in the fall of 2019. Each child will receive four books per week for 25 weeks, leading up to their beginning school in kindergarten in the fall of 2019.
- Provide books specifically curated to focus on topics related to intercultural understanding, financial literacy, and wellbeing/nutrition. Each of the 25 packages of books will also include a family information tip card (guiding parents/adults). The tip card will encourage the adult's support in creating a daily habit of reading for the children.
- Coordinate periodic reading events implemented by local service providers, including formal/informal preschools, the Head Start program, the public library, nonprofit organizations, and business leaders. Events will be held in multiple community locations including the library, police station, health centers, banks and others. This multifaceted approach will ensure that every 4-year-old's family has an opportunity to participate in meaningful and measurable family engagement activities and learn about the services available in the city.
- Implement a "whole community" approach to fundraising whereby project costs will be covered through a combination of: 1) corporate and foundation sponsorships, 2) small to medium-sized business and civic organization contributions, and 3) crowdsourced donations from individual residents. This broad recruitment of funding will also work to engender community-wide awareness and pride in Fort Morgan as a city of readers.

Where: Fort Morgan, Colorado

Why: Some startling statistics point to the need for such a program:

- 100 or more books in the home: Across the United States about 65% of families have less than 100 books in the home. Children with an abundance of books significantly out-perform peers in reading proficiency. The best predictor of academic success is homes with libraries of 100 or more books.
- Daily habit of reading: Children with an abundance of engaging books in their home are more likely to have a daily habit of reading. Children that have a daily habit of reading significantly out-perform peers in reading proficiency.
- Investing in four-year-olds: Pre-schoolers brains are ideally suited for learning language and reading. Supporting children to build literacy skills at home is one of our most important responsibilities.



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Additional Background:

Similar projects utilizing Unite for Literacy's *Growing Readers* product have been implemented in neighborhoods within cities across the United States, including Denver, Detroit, Louisville, Phoenix and families on 42 Native American Indian Reservations. Fort Morgan program cost will be \$62,500.

"I like to read with my son because I feel a connection with him," said Macarina Gonzales, a parent participant in the program in Denver. "When we read, he feels safety. I like to read because I'm learning English and I love it."

Tatiana Shibata, A National Center for Family Learning coordinator in Denver, noticed an immediate impact. "The children and parents in our program are excited—they are always waiting at the end of class to get their books before they head home. This is amazingly important; without it, we are setting up our kids for failure."