

Livonia Author Spells Out Engineering For Children

By Ken Abramczyk • OBSERVER STAFF WRITER • January 7, 2010

Patty O'Brien Novak remembers looking for a children's book on engineering.

It was a frustrating quest.

"I was looking at the library for books for little kids," Novak said. "I found books for students in middle grades and above. I kept looking and looking, but I never found one."

Novak, an engineer, figured it was time for children to understand who built and created everything from appliances to televisions.

Novak has written *Engineering the ABC's: How Engineers Shape Our World*. Novak wrote the book to expand the field of engineering to elementary students in grades K-5 or the 4-10 age group.

The book was released in December.

Novak worked as an engineer for 11 years in Ford Motor Co.'s Powertrain group, where she met her husband Rob and where he still works. She also spent two years as an engineering co-op with Cincinnati Milacron.

"My goal is to bring engineering to children," Novak said. "Kids don't realize the impact of engineers in their everyday lives. They don't know who builds their ovens or bridges.

"If you have anything that is mass-produced, it usually involves engineers," she said. "I wanted to have a book that is colorful and fun."

She used each letter of the alphabet and worked on it until she found an item she was comfortable with. Some letters were easy; others were difficult.

Novak chose the word "Car" for the letter C. The letter F was more difficult. "Fingerprints" soon changed to "Food." E stood for "Electricity" in which Novak described a power generating plant.

"Q was the hardest," Novak said. "Quilt wasn't feeling quite right so I decided on quarter." She used that section to describe the U.S. Mint. Novak would summarize each topic with three or four sentences.

Novak started her pursuit of the book by networking at a preschooler's program. She met Pat Kirksey, who introduced her to an editor with Nelson Publishing & Marketing of Northville in the group. After researching publishers, Novak decided on Nelson Publishing, which had experience publishing children's books.

Her 6-year-old son, Drew, is part of the inspiration for the book. Drew, who was 3 at the time, saw some of NASA's equipment on the NASA channel and told his mother, "I know who makes that...scientists," he said. His mother hinted to him that engineers work on them, too. "No, just scientists," he said.

"Other kids think that way, too," Novak said. "They don't know what engineers do."

Sometimes adults forget, too, what engineers do. One of the moms of the preschoolers told Novak that she thought engineers drove trains. Novak enjoyed reading part of the book to a class this past week. "The kids really enjoyed it, and the teacher will finish the book today with the class," Novak said. "One of the big surprises is the number of adults who enjoy it."

What are Novak's favorite letters in the book? They are I and W. "Ice cream is my favorite because it is the most fun, and water, because many people don't realize the engineering that is involved to bring it to you."

Engineering the ABC's: How Engineers Shape Our World is available at www.PattyOBrienNovak.com, by contacting Nelson Publishing & Marketing at (248) 735-0418, or by visiting www.nelsonpublishingandmarketing.com.

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