Literary Luncheon

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Literary heavyweights such as Aibileen and Minny from “The Help,” Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit and Lily Owens and Rosaleen Daise from “The Secret Life of Bees” came to lunch Sunday on the Butler County Community College campus.

Favorite books were brought to life during the second annual Luncheon for Literacy staged by the Rotary Club of Butler at the college's Founder's Hall.

Each of the 21 tables at the luncheon was decorated in the theme of a different book. This year's tables included such readers' favorites as “The Help,” “The Devil Wears Prada,” “Water for Elephants,” Beatrix Potter's “Peter Rabbit,” and “The Secret Life of Bees.”

Event co-chairman Amy Wilson said a sellout crowd of 120 raised $3,000 for the Adult Literacy Program at Butler County Community College.

“It was a wonderful event,” Wilson said. “It is so neat to see people's eyes light up when they walk into this room and see all the decorated tables. It makes for a really fun day.”

The event also featured guest speaker, author and Butler native Milann Ruff Daugherty; a used book sale; and a silent auction.

“We were so fortunate to get most of the food donated,” Wilson said. “We had few out-of-pocket expenses. Because most of the expenses were underwritten, a high percentage of the expenses go right to the literacy program.”

“I love reading and can't imagine what life would be without it,” said Deborah McAllister, adult literacy grants director at the community college. But she said there are an estimated 11,000 people in Butler County without a GED (general educational development) diploma or who are reading below a fifth-grade level. Reading and the power of words were illustrated by the Civil War letters of James Cleaver, the subject of Milann Ruff's Daugherty's book, “Your Affectionate Son.”
Daugherty said Cleaver, her great-great-uncle, wrote the letters home to his family in Bedford between 1861 and 1864 when he was serving with the Army of the Potomac.

“I found the letters in 2004 hidden away in the bottom drawer of a dresser in my mother’s house in Butler,” Daugherty said.

“He was an articulate, intelligent man and his writing was just so poetic as was the custom of the time,” Daugherty said.

She said it took her four years to prepare her book: a year to transcribe the 34 letters and to research and footnote the matters that Cleaver described: military equipment, army customs and medical treatments of the time.

Cleaver was a teacher and the son and the brother of Methodist ministers.

“You can see that influences throughout his letters,” Daugherty said. He didn't pray for his safety, she said, but “that I remain faithful.”