

Rosemary Wells is Very Serious about Early Childhood Literacy!

by Vikki Jo Stewart, Special Projects Coordinator

Rosemary Wells, author of *Bunny Cakes*, the book chosen for the 2006 Kansas Reads to Preschoolers, visited Kansas on Thursday, October 12, 2006. It was a day full of activities and opportunities for Rosemary and for the Kansas library community.

I first met Rosemary last April when the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) invited her to be a speaker for their teacher conference in Wichita. Jackie Lakin, KSDE, knew that Rosemary's book, *Bunny Cakes*, was selected for the State Library's preschooler reading initiative for 2006. Jackie told me she thought it might be helpful for me to meet her and get acquainted. I was grateful for the opportunity. Meeting Rosemary in April gave us a chance to plan for the Kansas Reads to Preschoolers project in the fall. We spent much of our time planning Rosemary's visit to Topeka in October.

Rosemary had autographed 350 *Max's ABC's* and 350 *My Shining Star* posters for Kansas public libraries and Early Childhood programs. Each library system and each urban library received autographed posters, as well as several hundred 4x6" fliers in September.

After many months of negotiations, e-mails and phone calls with Penguin Group, Rosemary Wells and several of her helpers chose Thursday, October 12, for her trip to Topeka. Rosemary would fly in early that morning to Kansas City International Airport. Penguin Group offered Kansas libraries and Early Childhood programs an opportunity to get copies of *Bunny Cakes* for 40% off with free shipping. Penguin Group also picked up the airfare, hotel, and transportation expenses for Rosemary Wells.

I had approached the Executive Director, Gary Brunk, Kansas Action for Children (KAC), to collaborate with the State Library for Rosemary's visit. KAC, an effective children's advocacy organization, offered to do a



Rosemary Wells, *Bunny Cakes* Author

reception for Rosemary with a focus on legislators, other children's organization leaders, and library leaders. KAC wanted to have a staff person pick Rosemary up at the airport so they could get acquainted. I escorted Rosemary for the rest of her stay. Rosemary also had lunch with Christie Brandau (State Librarian), Rosanne Seimens (KLA Executive Director), Betty Jean Neal and Jeff Dawson (Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library). Rosemary's first activity was a book signing at Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) in the LINGO room for librarians. Barnes and Noble brought copies of *Bunny Cakes* for sale. Rosemary signed all the books and then gave a talk about the importance of early literacy and her appreciation of libraries in the effort to make sure babies and preschoolers are prepared to come to school ready-to-learn!

Following the book signing I took Rosemary to my hotel room at the Capitol Plaza. She was interviewed by the Communications Director for KAC. That interview appears on www.kansasreadstokids.org and on KAC's homepage. In that interview, Rosemary emphasized the importance of reading to children. Parents should teach their children to love books. They should also teach them to talk about books and ask questions. That does a lot to prepare children to be taught in school. Too many children still come to school without having had someone read to them.

Rosemary did an OPAL presentation about writing and illustrating children's books with the help of Cindi Hickey, State Library. The OPAL presentation is also available on the Kansas Reads to Preschoolers website.



Rosemary Wells Signing Bunny Cakes at TSCPL

The invitation-only reception at the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library was beautifully decorated and a wonderful opportunity for Rosemary to share her enthusiasm for early literacy to legislators and others. Library leaders attending were: Christie Brandau, State Librarian; Gina Millsap, TSCPL director; Rosanne Siemens, KLA Executive Director; Joyce Davis, Emporia State University; Hans Fischer, KLTA President; Laura Loveless, KCKPL-West Wyandotte; Denise Smith, Stanton County Public Library, Johnson; and Joyce Armstrong, Hamilton County Public Library, Syracuse.

I took Rosemary to Barnes and Noble for a book signing following the reception. She signed all their stock copies of *Bunny Cakes*, *My Shining Star*, and other Rosemary Wells books. Rosemary offered advice on how to display and sell the copies at Christmas to store staff.

After a full and wonderful day Rosemary was hungry and wanted a Kansas steak. I took her to Timberline Steakhouse in Topeka. She and I had the very best bacon-wrapped filet mignons ever prepared in the Midwest.

I drove her to the Hilton at the airport and arrived about 11 p.m. She was very happy with the day's activities and hopeful for Kansas children.

Now the planning begins locally for the 2006 Kansas Reads to Preschoolers reading initiative November 13-19, 2006! Judge Joe Pierron, Kansas Appellate Court Judge and past emcee for the KLA Give-KLA-a-Leg-Up bees the past three years, will do two programs in Wichita that week. He believes, as Rosemary does, that reading to children is very important to helping children get to school ready-to-learn!

Check out the website at www.kansasreadstokids.org

Call or email me any questions or comments at Vikki Jo Stewart, Special Projects Director, State Library of Kansas, 620/331-8218 or vikki@kslib.info.