

Press Clippings 02/06/20

---Daily Herald---02/06/2020

Elgin entrepreneur inspires kids with popcorn book

Elgin entrepreneur aims to inspire kids with book about popcorn

By: Elena Ferrarin



Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn in Elgin, reads Monday from his new children's book to fourth-graders at **Fox Meadow Elementary School** in South Elgin. The book "Popa Pop-a-Lot's Poptastic Adventures" is available on Amazon.



Fox Meadow Elementary School fourth-grader Vanessa Cisneros listens intently to Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn in Elgin, as he talks to students about his popcorn-themed children's book. Sumner gave popcorn samples to all the kids.



Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn in Elgin, signed autographs for fourth-graders at Fox Meadow Elementary School in South Elgin after reading from his popcorn-themed children's book. *Rick West | Staff Photographer*



Fox Meadow Elementary School fourth-grader Aiden Langlean gets every last kernel of popcorn out of his sample bag as he listens to Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn in Elgin, talk about his popcorn-themed children's book.



Cameron Fugiel smiled as Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn in Elgin, read to fourth-graders at Fox Meadow Elementary School in South Elgin from his popcorn-themed children's book, "Popa Pop-a-Lot's Poptastic Adventures."



Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn in Elgin, talks to fourth-graders at Fox Meadow Elementary School in South Elgin about his popcorn-themed children's book.

A fun, inspiring story told by an exuberant guy who brings popcorn treats -- what kid wouldn't want that for school storytime?

Chris Sumner, owner of Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn, has been hopping across elementary schools in [Elgin Area School District U-46](#) to read from his recently self-published book, ["Popa Pop-a-Lot's Poptastic Adventures: Follow Your Dreams."](#)

The book is intended to be the first of a series, said the 32-year-old Sumner, who on Monday visited Fox Meadow Elementary School in South Elgin. "How can I inspire children at an early age? How can I give them some tools that will help them throughout their life journey?" he said. "That's kind of the purpose behind the book."

The book is about the importance of loving yourself and believing in yourself. Kids need to be inspired to think about their passions and futures, because by the time they get to high school, many have no idea what they want to do in life, Sumner said.

The students at Fox Meadow Elementary responded enthusiastically to Sumner's bubbly energy as he told them about growing up making popcorn with his mother and wanting to write children's books. He shared trivia about popcorn, like Nebraska being the state that produces the most popcorn, and asked the students what they want to be when they grow up.

A veterinarian, a marine biologist, the president of the United States, they answered. "I want to be famous," one said.

No matter what you want to do, follow your dreams and don't let others bring you down, Sumner told them.

The 32-year-old, who is married with two children, regularly speaks to high schoolers about what it's like to be an entrepreneur. Mama Lee's Gourmet Popcorn also has locations in Spring Hill Mall in West Dundee and Ford City Mall in Chicago; a fourth one is coming to Lincolnwood Mall in Lincolnwood, he said.

Sumner's book cover illustration was done by Matthew Chagoya, 16, a junior at Elgin High School who met Sumner when he came to talk to his class last year.

When Sumner asked the students what they wanted to be when they grew up, Matthew responded he wanted to be an animator or cartoonist.

Sumner looked at his drawings and asked Matthew if he'd want to illustrate the cover for his upcoming children's book.

Matthew said at first he hesitated because the task seemed daunting. "But then I'm like, if I skip this, I'm never going to get another chance," he said. "So I went with it."

He worked "diligently and patiently" on his illustration, which includes the Tower Building in downtown Elgin, and is happy and proud of the final product, he said. "I accomplished something this young, at this age," he said.

Sumner, who published his book in December, said he's already done about 65 readings to elementary school classes in the Elgin area, plus a couple in Chicago. His next goal is to create a "Popa Pop-a-Lot" cartoon animation series, he said.