Ready to Read Across Mattoon is the 2014 recipient of the Illinois Library Association Hugh C. Atkinson Memorial/DEMCO Award. The award recognizes an individual, group, program, or institution for sustained activity and contribution having a lasting impact on librarianship. The award is sponsored by DEMCO.

The Mattoon Middle School launched their school library/community reading initiative in 2002, modeled after the Chicago One Community One Book program. But they made a key innovation: they put the program in the hands of the students. A committee of 35-60 students (with a handful of teachers and adult community member volunteers) discusses and chooses the title from the Rebecca Caudill Young Readers’ Book Award Master List. As soon as the list is announced in the spring, the students begin reading and meeting weekly, debating which book should be chosen. They take the summer off, but resume meeting in the fall, making the choice by the Thanksgiving deadline. The book is announced and read throughout the school during December.

But the program doesn’t end there. In January the students come back together to initiate the community challenge. Mattoon Middle School Media Coordinator Anieta Trame raises the funds for Ready to Read, with which she purchases 1,000 copies of the chosen book. The students label the books and insert feedback postcards and fliers promoting Ready to Read Across Mattoon and asking the recipient to pass on the book. These books are then delivered to 35 businesses in Mattoon. The students also go out and speak at 25 organizations promoting the program, and these businesses, organizations, and even individuals donate to the program. Those funds keep it going year after year, and show that Ready to Read Across Mattoon is a program the whole community values.

The Hugh C. Atkinson Memorial/DEMCO Award will be presented at the Illinois Library Association Annual Conference Awards Luncheon on Tuesday, October 14, 2014 at 12:00 noon at the Prairie Capital Convention Center, Springfield, Illinois.

For further information, contact the Illinois Library Association.