

Family Fun Fest encourages kids' summer reading

By **LESLIE LAKE**
 HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — The sweltering heat did little to deter the little ones who came to Union Park on Saturday for a celebration of books, arts, and culture at a free Family Fun Festival.

The Festival, themed Celebrate World Heroes, was organized by the libraries of Norwalk, the Early Childhood Council (ECC), and the Norwalk Arts Society in part to promote Norwalk's Citywide Summer Reading Challenge.

"The Early Childhood Council is a collaboration of Norwalk groups, libraries, preschools, local businesses, the local health centers, the Health Department, and the City of Norwalk with the goal of improving outcomes for all of the children in Norwalk," said Mary Oster, City of Norwalk Mayor's Early Childhood Education Coordi-

nator. "We are giving away books today to encourage summer reading."

Standing next to an ECC table loaded with children's books in both English and Spanish, Oster oversaw the free book giveaway intuitive.

"Having kids read every day during the summer stops some of the 'summer slide,'" Oster said. "They go back to school ready to learn. Summer reading is one of the best things you can do for your kids."

According to the Norwalk Libraries website, participation in Norwalk's Summer Reading Program will "keep your brain active and ready to start school again in the fall."

In keeping with the World Heroes theme, local representatives from African and Latin American countries, as well as those from India, Ireland, Italy, Greece and the Caribbean were invited to set up tables and



Hour photo/Danielle Calloway

Westley Soreff, 6, gets his face painted during Norwalk's Citywide Summer Reading Challenge-Family Fun Festival at Union Park in Norwalk Saturday morning.

booths with food, music, clothing, and dance as they tell about their favorite heroes from their culture.

The Festival was a perfect fit for Dulce Gandhi, director of Norwalk's Kumon Math and Reading Centers.

"Kumon is one of the sponsors of the Summer Reading Series and we encourage our students to read every day," Gandhi said. "I'm also here today to teach children about Indian culture."

Local heroes were also recognized at the Festival as the Norwalk Fire and Marine Unit

received a 2015 local heroes award from the Norwalk Arts Society.

"The award is given to local first responders," said NFD Deputy Chief Ed Prescott. "Our marine unit consists of 16 trained firefighters and works out of the East Norwalk station."

Games, live music, face painting, crafts, a story walk, rounded out the festival-as well as a strong reminder for children to read during the summer.

See FAMILY Page A8



Hour photo/Danielle Calloway

Luisa Soares and her son Nicholas, 5, watch live music during Norwalk's Citywide Summer Reading Challenge-Family Fun Festival at Union Park in Norwalk Saturday morning.

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From Page A1

The Norwalk Summer Reading Challenge criteria and prizes can be found on the Norwalk Public Library website:

"Read-to-Me (Ages Birth to 5) - For the first 15 books you read you will win a prize at the Norwalk Public Library and for every 15 books read you will be entered into a raffle drawing to win a Kindle Fire and \$50 gift card to Amazon and Superhero Lego sets.

Elementary Age Read-

ers (Entering Grades 1-5) - For the first 5 books you read you will win a prize at the Norwalk Public Library and for every 5 books you will be entered into a raffle to win a Kindle Fire and \$50 gift card to Amazon, Superhero Lego sets, and a bag full of new books! There are special challenges you can complete all summer to win extra raffle tickets.

Teen Program (Entering Grades 6-12) - For the first 5 books, you win a coupon for a free meal at Subway. For every 5

books after that, you will be entered into a raffle to win a totebag full of new books and also the grand prize Kindle Fire and \$50 gift card to Amazon!"

The Norwalk Summer Reading Committee includes Norwalk Public Library System, East Norwalk Library, Rowayton Library, Early Childhood Council, Norwalk Public Schools, Talent Education Suzuki School and Norwalk ACTS.

Information: www.norwalkpubliclibrary.org