

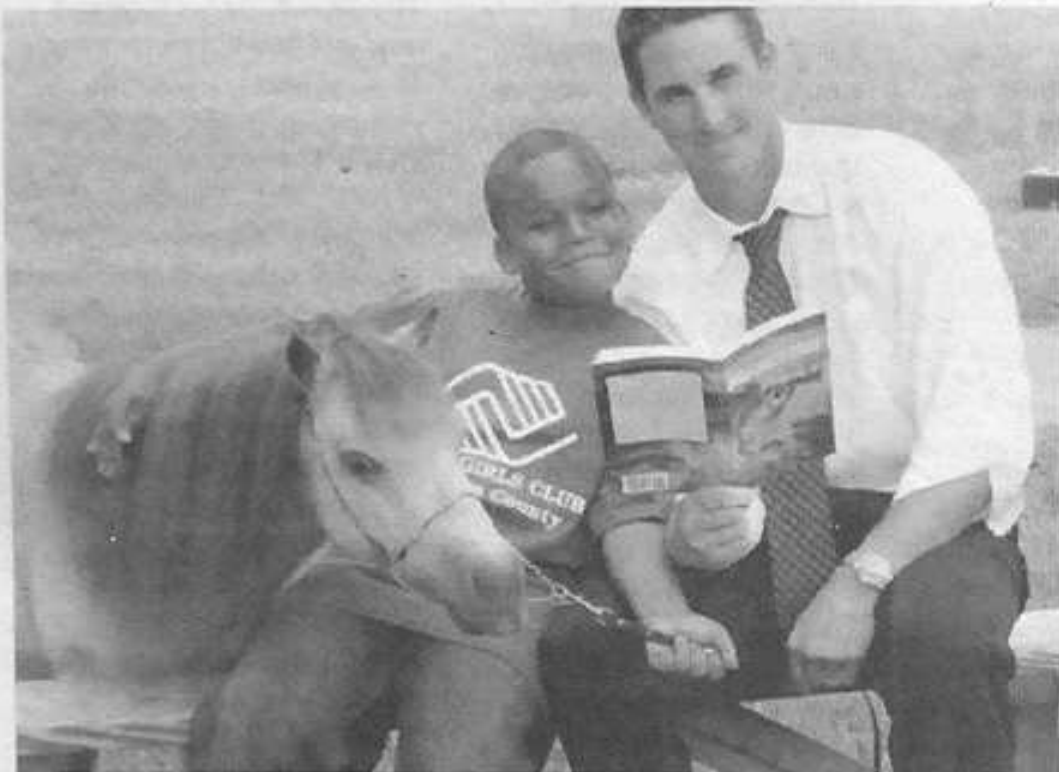
# Club promotes 'Power of Reading'

Boys and Girls Club joins Gainesville author Shelley Mickle Fraser in program.

By AIDA MALLARD  
Special to The Voice

**A** miniature horse, a former University of Florida Gator and Atlanta Falcons quarterback and a young boy from the Boys & Girls Club of Alachua County helped to kick off "The Power of Reading," a program that promotes literacy.

Keith Blanchard, president and chief professional officer of the Boys & Girls Club of Alachua County, said the Boys and Girls Club has joined forces with Wild Onion Press, founded by local author Shelley Fraser Mickle, in "The Power of Reading," a program that promotes literacy through photo essays, or posters, of a celebrity athlete reading with a child from the Boys & Girls Club. Wild Onion is a publishing company that features books about



PHOTOS BY AIDA MALLARD/SPECIAL TO THE VOICE

children with physical differences.

And the first photo essay featured Doug Johnson, a former Gator and Atlanta Falcons quarterback; Savion Small, a second-grader at Lawton Chiles Elementary, and Sundance, a miniature therapy horse and a character in "Jason and Elihu," a book by Mickle.

Savion and Johnson read "Jason and Elihu" while

Sundance hung out for photos last Wednesday afternoon at the Northwest Boys & Girls Club. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book and photo essay will benefit children in foster care.

Mickle said "Jason and Elihu" is set in Cross Creek and features two foster children trapped between the home they have and the one the long

for and a 10-year-old girl with a brain tumor that affects her balance, which robs her of her dream to be an ice skater.

"Athletes reading with children is a great message, and bound to make an impact," Mickle said. "And when a child with physical differences see themselves as a hero in a story, it empowers them."

Johnson said the Boys &



Left: Sundance, a therapy horse, with Savion Small, a second grader at Lawton Chiles Elementary, and Doug Johnson, a former Gator and NFL quarterback, at the Northwest Boys & Girls Club.

Above: Johnson and Shelley Fraser Mickle with her book, "Jason and Elihu."

Girls Club has been a very important part of his life. From ages 5 to 13, Johnson attended after-school, summer and sports programs at the Boys & Girls Club. And he credits the Boys & Girls Club with giving him the structure to help him succeed.

"It gives kids a positive structure," Johnson said. "Kids come to a safe place with good role models and

sports to help mold a young person."

Making note of funding constraints faced by the Boys & Girls Club, Johnson said he wants to see the Boys & Girls Club continue to help children. "That's why I'm so passionate about raising funds," said Johnson, also one of the founders of the Doug Johnson and Donnie Young Reeling for Kids Fishing Tournament, an annual benefit of the Boys & Girls Club.

Blanchard said Savion is a good representative of the Boys & Girls Club.

April Ellis said she and her son, Savion, are happy he was chosen to represent the Boys & Girls Club in the photo essay. "It's a great opportunity," Ellis said.

And Savion also was quite pleased. "It was fun, like cool," he said.

For more information about the Boys & Girls Club, visit [www.my-boysandgirlsclub.com](http://www.my-boysandgirlsclub.com). To purchase books and photo essays, visit [www.wildonionpress.com](http://www.wildonionpress.com).