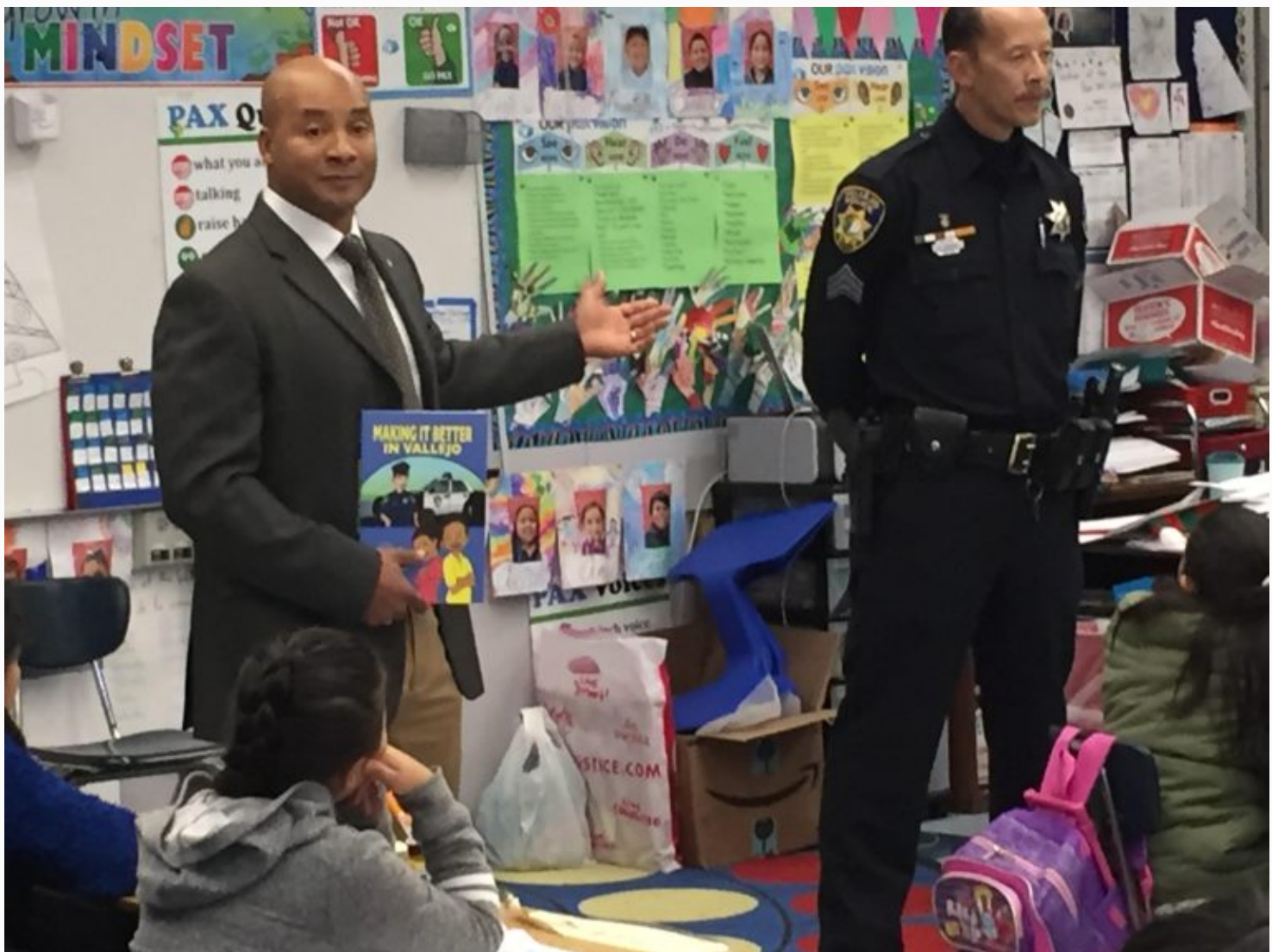


## LIFESTYLE

# Pilot lands children's book in hands of third graders

'Making It Better' connects kids, cops



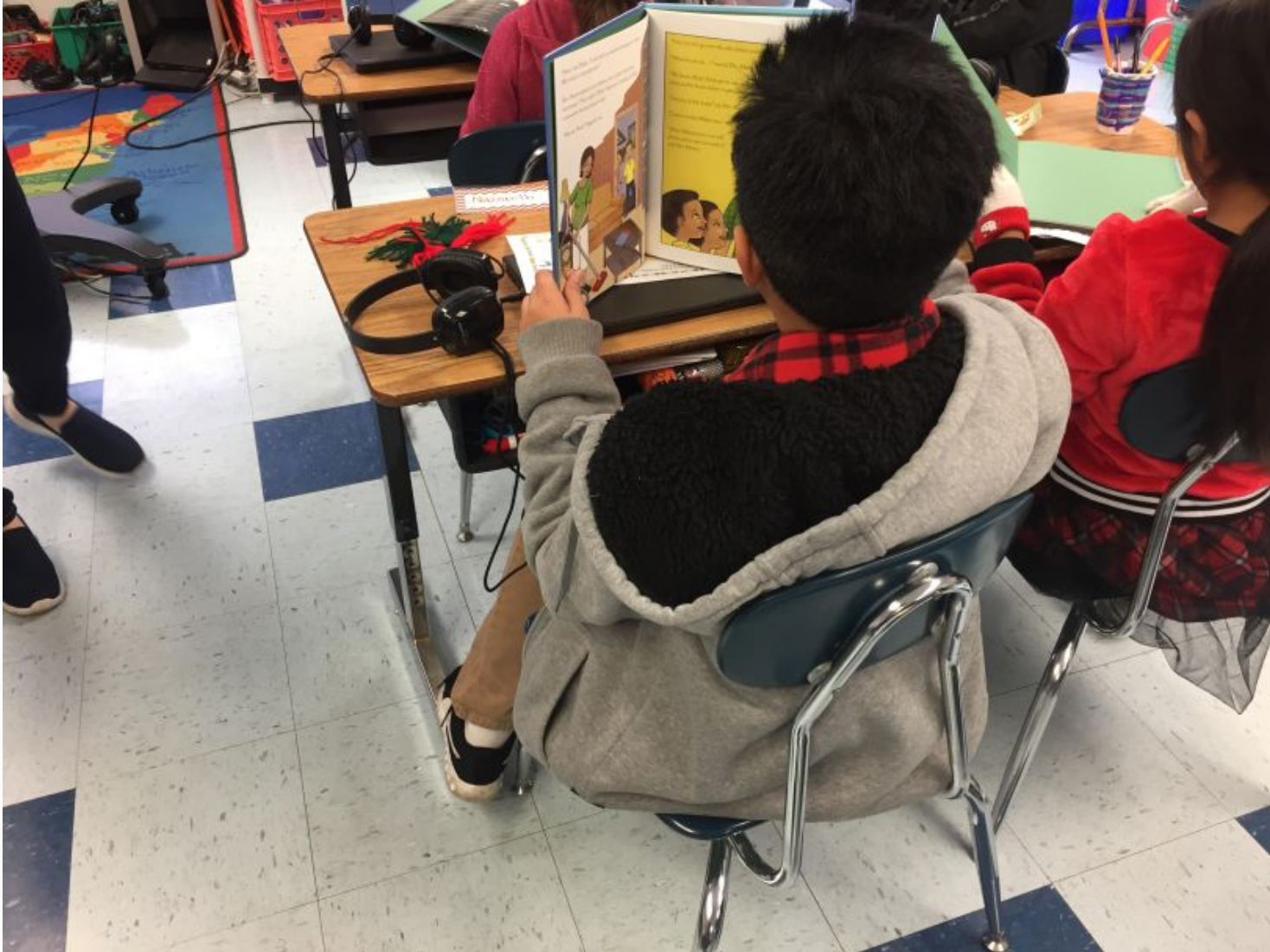
Andre Lewis took his latest book, 'Making It Better in Vallejo' to Dan Mini Elementary School with the help of several Vallejo officers, including Sgt. Brent Garrick, above, right. (Rich Freedman—Times-Herald)

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Officers Bradley Phillips and Heather Lamb got the star treatment at Mini Elementary as they autographed the book they read to third graders. (Rich Freedman–Times-Herald).

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Three third-grade classes at Dan Mini Elementary received a free copy of local author Andre Lewis' book, 'Making It Better in Vallejo.' (Rich Freedman—Times-Herald)

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André Lewis flies for FedEx. Globally. He's landed on every continent. At last count, that would be seven.

No, Lewis hasn't met Tom Hanks — flashback to the 2000 film, "Castaway," when the actor portrays the lone survivor of a FedEx plane crash.

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More importantly, Lewis has met thousands of kids — but not wearing his pilot's uniform.

Though Lewis transitioned from the Air Force to FedEx, he never grounded his love of writing for children. His latest work, "Making It Better In Our Community" brings it to 15 books ranging from anti-bullying to inspiring dreams, father involvement, childhood obesity, anti-gun violence, faith, and suicide prevention.

At last count, Lewis has presented his books to 50,000 young students in 30 school districts. Make that roughly 50,075 students after this past Thursday's appearance at Dan Mini Elementary in Vallejo when Lewis joined four Vallejo police officers in reading the customized "Making It Better In Vallejo" to three third-grade classes.

"Primarily what I've done is create the book for the police officer to engage with the student," Lewis said.

The kids were apparently impressed, lining up for the cops to sign the book afterward with Lewis posing with the students for pictures.

This whole customizing thing — "It makes it personal," said Lewis — who began in 2013 when the author created a book specifically for Casper, Wyo., police.

"The purpose was to build that bond," said Lewis, a Benicia resident and former Vallejoan.

Lewis also modified the generic book for Police Athletic League's 100th anniversary before venturing in his own backyard, presenting his recent work to the Benicia Police Deptment in the summer of 2016.

It went over so well, Benicia Police Chief Erik Upson wrote about the experience in the publication, California Police Chief.

Upson called Lewis "a remarkable individual who has dedicated himself to finding ways to help connect law enforcement with the community, especially our most vulnerable population."

Books are purchased — often via grants — through Lewis' company, Literary Engineers and given to all kids for free. At Dan Mini, the books were funded by asset forfeitures, said Sgt. Brent Garrick.

Third grade is an ideal target audience, Lewis and Garrick agreed, because it's "a critical part of the education process. After fourth or fifth grades, it takes a significant emotional dent to modify behavior," Lewis said.

Lewis can modify the books to include specific logos and uniforms, making it more personal for the officers and the students.

The book features students and officers of all colors, a major component, Lewis said.

“It’s one of the great things about what we do ... the diversity,” he said.

Then again, depending on the community, “there’s an understanding of the demographics,” noted Lewis.

Take Casper where Lewis has built a big support base.

“You make sure the leader of the gang is a Caucasian boy with freckles,” Lewis said smiling.

Father of three teenage daughters, Lewis said he could have used “all” of his books when he was in third grade.

“Our books are ‘children’s books,’ but the mainstay true value is for parents and educators as well,” he said.

Not only has Lewis distributed books at U.S. schools, he’s helped ship 300 books to Kenya and to the Marshall Islands.

“We’re always trying to find an organization” who sponsors the funding, Lewis said, laughing that “I’m still working on FedEx after 20 years.”

Lewis sees a future project of writing a book specific to kids in long-term hospital stays that will help allay their fears. Another book in the works is on ethics, religion and the strength of differences. Another is a safety book.

Garrick is thrilled with Lewis and the “Making It Better In Vallejo” book and how it was received by the students and hopes to get it into the hands of every Vallejo third grader by the end of the school year after hitting three schools before the Christmas break.

Garrick, a lifetime Vallejoan who attended Dan Mini Elementary, said the book project is close is important.

“This was one of the last projects I wanted to get off the ground before I retire,” Garrick said. “I could have certainly used this book.”

*For more information, visit [literaryengineers.com](http://literaryengineers.com).*

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## Richard Freedman



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