Consumers providing $220K for education

By Tarryl Jackson
tjackson@citpat.com — 768-4941

Consumers Energy has awarded $220,000 to early childhood education and community programs that help Jackson County children and their families.

The money will support programs that provide free books to preschoolers, mentoring and child-care payment assistance, said Consumers Energy said.

Dave Mengebier, president of the Consumers Energy Foundation, said there is a tremendous need for early education programs in the community.

"It's an investment in our children, and it's an investment in our economy," he said.

"This is an area that the company wants to focus its charitable giving in."

Last year, the company provided $195,000 in grants for early childhood programs.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm launched Project Great Start in her 2005 State of the State address, with the goal that education begins at birth, rather than when a child enters school.

Early childhood programs will help some children avoid having to do remedial work in the future, said Carolyn Bloodworth, director of corporate giving at Consumers Energy.

"It's a good use of our resources," she said. "It puts everyone on the same path."

The Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County will receive $10,000 for parent education, data assessment to measure the effectiveness of early childhood programs and its Imagination Library program.

"It's very encouraging that every year they come back with a new commitment," said Sheri Butters, the collaborative's director. "It shows they believe in what we're doing."

Currently, about 3,500 children are enrolled in Imagination Library, which provides one free book per month to children from birth to age 5. More than 45,000 books have been given to families.