

English is key, immigrant says; Entrepreneur donates books

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Body

Boxes of **books** line the East Cobb office of Anna Cablik, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Panama, successful businesswoman and ardent supporter of the Republican Party.

Cablik bought the **books** and plans to give them this year to non-**English**-speaking students at Brumby Elementary School in Marietta and another school in Valdosta --- just as she did last year. With titles such as "Storyland Treasury" and "Best Loved Bedtime Stories," the **books** hold a **key**, in Cablik's view, to the future of Georgia's fast-growing Hispanic community.

"I want Hispanic children, whether they are here legally or illegally, to learn how to read and speak **English**," **said** Cablik, 54, who owns three construction companies and advises Gov. Sonny Perdue on Latino issues.

"There are those within the Hispanic community who may or may not agree with me, but we need to learn **English** and to fully accept the U.S. customs and language," she **said**. "It's not right to impose our customs and language on a country that has accepted us. Because of that, I am very proud to be an American citizen."

Her zeal to educate Hispanic children is born from a strong belief that **immigrants** who leave their country for the United States should embrace its language and customs. Yet she empathizes with people trying to enter the United States illegally.

"I do not agree with illegal immigration. You should enter the United States through proper channels," she **said**. "But the immigration system is completely broken. It can literally take you 40 years to obtain a visa and enter the U.S. legally. If I live in a country where there are no jobs and my family is starving, I'm coming to the United States any way I can."

Cablik grew up on a 750-acre farm in Panama where her father raised chickens and cows and grew vegetables and coffee.

"My feet were always covered with calluses, because I was always barefoot," she **said**. "I grew up owning only two pairs of shoes. We didn't have much, but we never went hungry."

Finding time between chores, Cablik would scurry to her room to read her favorite **book**, "Grimm's Fairy Tales."

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In 1974, she came to the United States with her husband, Jerry Cablik. She worked as a medical technician at Piedmont Hospital and sold construction materials part time.

About eight years after arriving, with just \$500 and one employee, Cablik founded Anatek, a steel-erection company that specializes in bridge construction. She went on to found a steel-fabrication company called Anasteel and Massana, a construction company. Those companies had combined sales of \$17 million last year.

Cablik sits on the boards of the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Georgia Power, Branch Banking & Trust (BB&T) and the Greater Atlanta Economic Alliance.

"Anna is one of the hardest working individuals I know," **said** Sara Gonzalez, president of the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "She is outspoken, because she's the type of person who's not going to tell you something just to please you. She speaks her mind, like I do."

An avid reader as a child and as an adult, Cablik is reading "The Life and Legend of Jay Gould" written by Maury Klien and "America: The Last Best Hope" by William Bennett. She bought the children's **books** with her own money to give to students in Marietta and Valdosta.

"The kids love them, as do our [**English** to Speakers of Other Languages] teachers," **said** Josh Morreale, Brumby Elementary Intermediate School's principal. "Our ESOL teachers are most appreciative of these **books**, because they help meet the needs of their students."

When not pontificating on the need to educate the Hispanic community or overseeing a multimillion dollar construction project, she can also be found tooting her political views as a staunch conservative within the Republican Party.

She served as an elector for President Bush in 2000 and 2004 and as Georgia delegate to the Republican National Convention in New York in 2004.

"Overall, it's 50-50 when it comes to Hispanics who are Democrats or Republicans," Cablik **said**.

As debate continues on immigration reform, Cablik tells a personal story to support her view that the current system does not work well.

In 1985, the same year Cablik became a U.S. citizen, she began the drawn-out process of obtaining a visa for her sister, Susana Haug.

"I finally obtained a visa for her in 1998, but by that time she changed her mind and did not want to come to the United States," she **said**. "I feel for all those wanting to immigrate to the U.S. from Mexico, because there are no visas available."

Graphic

Photo: LOUIE FAVORITE / Staff "It's not right to impose our customs and language on a country that has accepted us," **says** Anna Cablik, a naturalized U.S. citizen whose company helped build the 17th Street bridge (background).

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