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## A fundraising 'Bridge' for schools: Students to market book; education gets cut of profits

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As a former school board member, Dennis Christen has overseen his fair share of education fundraising — and most of it wasn't pretty.

"We'd have children selling chocolate candies in front of the supermarkets," said the Orem native. "Kids were accosted, beaten up. Candy and money were stolen."

Now, though his days hassling co-workers to purchase pre-made cookie dough are over, the author of the best-selling book "Madam, the Grass is High," still has nightmares about securing enough money to keep children supplied with textbooks and construction paper.

"I knew I could find a better way to raise money," the author, actor and producer said.

And he did.

Instead of marketing his latest children's book series, "Lundon's Bridge," through conventional avenues like Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com, Christen opted to make the books available for sale exclusively through schools. The best part: Schools get a 50 percent cut of the profits.

Here's how it works.

During class, teachers show students a short video, not unlike a theatrical preview, dramatizing the plot of the paperback. Children spread the word and pass out books. For every novel sold, the school gets \$6.48.

"What parent is going to object when their kid comes to them and asks them to buy a book?" Christen said. "Instead of contributing to the obesity problem by shoving chocolate down their throats, we want to educate them."

Christen is so dedicated to the cause that, after handing the Deseret News a complimentary copy of the paperback, he insisted on donating \$6.48 to a local elementary school. No book will leave the shelves without benefiting a school somewhere, he said — paid for or not.

For Christen, "Lundon's Bridge," is very much a personal endeavour.

He and his daughter, for whom the book's heroine was named, worked for more than a decade to make the 221-

page novel a reality.

When, as a 3-year-old, Lundon Christen clasped a stranger's hand and wandered out of her father's sight, Dennis

Christen came up with the plot for "Lundon's Bridge," which deals with child kidnapping.

"The story is all about bringing back belief in the family unit," Dennis Christen said. "It's full of magic and it's all

driven by love."

The tale follows a little girl as she works to quell a war between the land, the sea, and the various mythical creatures

who inhabit both. It is her unwavering belief in her parents that saves the day.

Lundon Christen, who died from kidney failure shortly before the book was released, "was a daddy's girl," said

Dennis Christen. "She never stopped believing in me."

He felt, as he worked to find a production studio willing to make his book into a movie, that his daughter was

overseeing the project from above with her "wings strapped on."

Sandman Studios, located in Pleasant Grove, turned out to be that production studio. Jerry Cross, who heads the

company, decided to pick up "Lundon's Bridge" because he fell in love with the idea of using media to help boost

education.

"We all have kids," he said. "We've all sat down with teachers and heard their woes."

With an unconventional marketing strategy inspired by Dennis Christen, Sandman Studios plans to show the movie

only in elementary school cafeterias transformed for an evening of fundraising into a "theater," Cross said. Schools

will collect 50 percent of the admission price.

With actors like Shawn King, Larry King's wife, and Joey Fatone, formerly of 'N Sync, slated to participate in the

project, Sandman Studios is certain "Lundon's Bridge" will be a hit.

"It's a good story," Cross said. "It's something I would want my children to see."

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