

Little Libraries restocked

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Abstract: The books ranging from "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" to the latest Dan Brown novel are free to anyone who passes by one of the seven miniature neighborhood libraries -- as long as they return it or replace it with another book.

Full text: Book donations have poured into Salem's Little Free Libraries after two sites lost nearly their entire collections earlier this month.

The books ranging from "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" to the latest Dan Brown novel are free to anyone who passes by one of the seven miniature neighborhood libraries -- as long as they return it or replace it with another book.

But someone took three-quarters of the books from the library on 17th Street NE, including the guest book, and the library on Fifth Street NE lost everything. Volunteers build and stock the libraries with donated books.

The shelves didn't remain empty for long. Offers of support and donations flooded Salem's Little Free Libraries Facebook page as well as volunteers' doorsteps.

"People have just been coming out of the woodwork," said volunteer Ben Light. "The community has really rallied around us."

Four boxes of books showed up at Light's front door to restock his library on 17th Street. Now it's so full, he said, he couldn't stuff another book in if he tried. The rest will go into his backup collection in case books go missing again.

"This wasn't the way it was supposed to work," he said, "but at least the books are out there, and in theory someone is reading them, and to us that is a success."

Rick Brooks, the co-founder of the international Little Free Library movement, agrees.

"The most popular question is 'won't people steal the books,' and the answer is you can't steal a free book," he said.

As many as 15,000 miniature libraries span 54 countries, he said, and in most cases they end up with too many books. But stewards can always stamp books with the phrase "Always a gift, never for sale" to discourage those who want to turn a profit.

It also helps to put up photos of the people who built the library or those who use it so visitors know that it's real people they're hurting, he said. In the future Light plans to write "17th Street NE LFL" on the side of all his books in hopes that he doesn't get cleaned out again.

But it's the community's response and not the missing books that has made the biggest impression. Jason Ramey, who helped install the first Little Free Library in Salem with his wife Jessica, appreciates the outpouring.

"It is this type of generosity of spirit that originally inspired us all to create a little library," he said on Facebook, "and I thank all of you for making our community better."

Denise Twist got calls from people she knew and even ones she didn't to donate books to her library on Fifth Street NE, including an offer from West Salem's Little Free Library. Now she has reserves of books coming out her ears, she said.

"It just affirms the fact that sure you will have people who do crazy, crappy things," she said, "but whatever they took out of my library we have back four- or five-fold."

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Salem's Little Free Libraries

2055 Summer St. SE, Jessica Ramey, steward, jessica@diystudio.net
2265 Woodhill St. NW, Sonja Somerville, steward, somerville4jars@yahoo.com
2035 17th St. NE, Benjamin Light, steward, benjaminlight@hotmail.com
445 Leslie St. SE, David Craig, steward, dpcraig@willamette.edu
4566 Goldenrod Ave. NE, Marilyn Nichols, steward, Nicholme2@comcast.net
1254 Ruge St. NW, Tawnie Sweet, steward
825 Belmont St. NE

For more, information go to facebook.com/SalemsLittleFreeLibraries

Online extras

See this story at StatesmanJournal.com for a link to a map of Salem's Little Free Libraries

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