WBSD IN-DEPTH

One Teacher's Tenacity Results in Books for Neighborhood Kids

A popular feature at the park in the Prairie Meadow Subdivision in West Bend is there because of a determined teacher from Fair Park Elementary. The park now features a Little Free Library, a "take a book, return a book" free book exchange that is a small wooden box. Anyone may take a book or bring a book to share.

Stacy Beltman, a kindergarten teacher at Fair Park Elementary for the past 10 years who now teaches first grade at Fair Park, had wanted to install a Little Free Library in her own yard for several years but had concerns about the approval process and where exactly to place it.

After she saw a Little Free Library at West Bend's Villa Park last year, she contacted her West Bend alderman, Chris Jenkins, with her idea.

Mike Jentsch of the West Bend Parks and Recreation Department helped Stacy to select a spot at Prairie Meadow Subdivision Park.

Getting denied for a grant from the Little Free Library Organization didn't deter Stacy. Rather, she reached out to friends and family with her plan and someone generously offered to build the library. She stained and painted the wooden "mini library" and her dad installed it.

The Prairie Meadow neighborhood held a Grand Opening for the Little Free Library. Since the subdivision is in the Decorah Elementary attendance area, Stacy invited Jenny Shrage, library technician at Decorah, to read to the children at the grand opening.

Stacy reports that she visits the library every few days to check the selection and if there are kids in the park, they will quickly check out what she added.

Says Stacy, "I love seeing the kids who picked a book and are reading while standing over the bikes they dropped to the ground."

West Bend High Schools band teacher Leah Duckert-Kroll also hosts a Little Free Library in her own yard, providing added inspiration for Stacy.