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Little Free Library offerings to be expanded as Scottsbluff/Gering Rotary works with libraries, school district to encourage reading

By JAMIE ROSE CHEN Star-Herald Jul 2, 2019 Updated Jul 2, 2019



With help from her husband, David, Susan Martin of Scottsbluff has opened a Little Free Library in her front yard on Fifth Avenue. Little Free Libraries will be expanded in Scottsbluff and Gering through a program with the Scottsbluff/Gering Rotary, Scottsbluff schools and local libraries
Steve Frederick/Star-Herald

SCOTTSBLUFF — The Scottsbluff/Gering Rotary, local libraries and the school district are partnering to expand the availability of books to people in the community by establishing Little Free Libraries.

Nonprofit organization Rotary International lists literacy as one of their primary causes, and aim to increase education quality and literacy around the world. A Wisconsin Rotarian founded a Little Free Libraries program in honor of his late mother.

"I really believe in a Little Free Library on every block and a book in every hand," said Todd Bol, the Wisconsin Rotarian.

When Rotarian Megan Hayward heard that a Rotary district was offering a matching grant for a literacy project, she began to look into options that were feasible for the local community.

"We as a group already promote literacy by going to schools," Hayward said. "But we wanted to get books to people and encourage literacy in a way that could continue beyond that one year."

The Scottsbluff/Gering Rotary partnered with the Lied Scottsbluff Public Library, Gering Public Library and Scottsbluff Public Schools. With funds from the Rotary and the matching grant from Rotary District 5440, they were able to not only work together to build the little free libraries, but also stock them with books.

"We want to include a bit of everything — from children's books to adult books, both fiction and nonfiction," Noelle Thompson, Scottsbluff's library director, said.

The Scottsbluff library will also be contributing books purchased through the Scholastic Book program with donations not only from larger businesses, but also community members who gave money or donated their books after their children grew out of them.

Gering Public Library will also be contributing books donated throughout the school year.

The locations for the little libraries were chosen by the respective library directors.

"We went with the parks that were across a main road, to reach people who might not be able to get to the library," said Diane Downer, who has been working at the library since 1990 and has been director since 2006.

Her sentiments were echoed by Thompson, who said the chosen locations were strategic. Little Free Libraries will be offered at the Westmoor Pool, on 27th Street and at the Lakota Lutheran Center, all in Scottsbluff; and McLellan Park at 476 D St., Hampton Park at Fifth and S streets, and Johannes Park on Hackberry Drive, all in Gering.

"We looked at things like bus stops and foot traffic when we were considering locations. If someone is going to be on a bus for 30 minutes, that's a great time for them to read a book," she said.

Little Free Libraries is based on the concept of "Take a Book, Share a Book." Set up in local communities, those who walk by can take a book and are encouraged to leave a book of their own. There are over 75,000 Little Free Libraries in 88 countries around the world.

A dedication ceremony will held on Tuesday, July 9, at 1:10 p.m. It will be held on the west side of Westmoor Swimming Pool.