



Leave a Book, Take a Book

Promoting literacy and community
one Little Free Library at a time.

ARTICLE LISA ALLEN | PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED



One movie that all three of my kids can agree on is “Ferris Beuller’s Day Off.” They even recite lines now and then, including the ubiquitous “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”

That quote has now become our standard when we’re driving in a new part of town, though it goes more like this: ‘Little free libraries might be here, Mom! If you don’t stop driving so fast, we might miss them.’

Thousands of Little Free Libraries can be found throughout the United States as well as in places across the globe like Lithuania and Lebanon, Rome and Winnipeg and Sao Paulo and Dublin. As of this writing, there are more than 15,000 Little Free Libraries scattered across the world.

The original Little Free Library was built to resemble a one room schoolhouse. Todd Bol built it as a tribute to his mother, a former school teacher with a passion for reading. He adorned it with a sign that said ‘free books,’ mounted it on a post in his Hudson, Wisc., yard, and filled it with books.

He built more and gave them away, and then joined forces with Rick Brooks of Madison, Wisc. Together, they saw the potential to effect good through the giving and receiving of books. The non-profit



organization Little Free Library's goals are twofold: to promote literacy and the love of reading for both children and adults through free book exchanges worldwide and to promote a sense of community.

What started in 2009 as a tribute to one mother has grown into an international movement that not only promotes the love of reading, but is also beginning to evolve into walking and biking tours and is, in some places, influencing school curriculum as well as service and social media projects.

The Little Free Library concept is not unlike that of a traditional library, though the differences are significant. There is no need for a card, and there are no due dates or fines, and the selection of books is ever changing. Everyone is encouraged to leave a book or to take a book, and can return it or not, at his or her discretion.

Even more fun is that each Little Free Library can reflect its owner through its design. Many look like exaggerated bird-

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houses, but others vary in shape, size and decoration. Some, like one near Summit Pointe Elementary in Lee's Summit, is painted to look like an owl, thanks to local artist Dave Eames. Others in the Metro include an upcycled mailbox, painted periwinkle blue and decorated with painted yellow flowers.

Official Little Free Libraries are chartered with the non-profit Little Free Library and are included on a comprehensive online map. While there is a fee to obtain a charter, the planning and construction of each unit is left up to the discretion of the owner. Kits are available for purchase, but many opt to use recycled or repurposed items to

build a distinctive container that mirrors their reasons behind joining the movement, and several are part of landscape vignettes that include gardens and benches.

The Metro area is home to about a dozen at last count but that number is always growing. Five girls of Girl Scout Troop 413 are building a Little Free Library at Ravenwood Elementary School in Olathe as



a means of earning the coveted Bronze Award. The Troop will mount the Little Free Library near the outdoor classroom, with the hope that it will encourage students and neighbors to nurture a love of

reading through the summer months.

The Little Free Library at Rolling Ridge Elementary is a lasting reminder of the love for Marilyn Peterson. Peterson was a librarian at the school for more than 20 years, and her daughter, Kate Thompson, is a librarian at Olathe Northwest High School. When Peterson passed away, her family donated \$500 to the school's library.

Lesley Sheldon, also a librarian at Rolling Ridge, stumbled across an article about Little Free Libraries while contemplating how to memorialize Peterson in a meaningful and lasting way.



"The rest was history," says Sheldon. "We have been blessed with many donations and several of our families watch over the library on weekends and over extended breaks. It is such a special project."

To learn more and to browse the official Little Free Library map, visit LittleFreeLibrary.org.

