

Little Free Libraries

Expanding Ashland Public Library's reach

Libraries to be placed across the city this spring

By **BECKY MEZIERE**
Correspondent

Take one, leave one.

It's a pretty simple concept, but for the Little Free Libraries set to be unveiled in Ashland this spring, it can make a big difference.

The Ashland Public Library is expanding its reach to promote literacy and the love of books with the addition of Little Free Libraries across town, which will provide myriad books for anyone to take and enjoy.

Support Services Manager Hayley Tracy-Bursley spearheaded the development of six Little Free Libraries for Ashland.

"We are always looking for new ways to be innovative and meet community needs," Tracy-Bursley said. "That's ultimately why we are here. We are here for the community, to meet their needs and promote access for them."

Little Free Libraries will be stocked with books — as a separate entity from the library — there are no due dates or library cards needed and people are encouraged to leave books they've enjoyed, as well.

"We want to provide access to materials," Tracy-Bursley said. "We do the best that we can to remove barriers to that."

The small, house-shaped cupboards with shelves and Plexiglas doors are the brainchild of the Little Free Library Organization, which has been providing and placing libraries since 2009 with more than 60,000 worldwide in more than 80 countries.

Tracy-Bursley saw them as a way to reach more people in the community with books and resources, applying the library's mission statement to "connect people with ideas, information, and inspiration."

"Books do all of those things," Tracy-Bursley said. "I think using books and materials to create community and reinforce community is a big thing. ... (With Little Free Libraries) You have communities sharing what they are reading and what they enjoy."

Community Relations Coordinator Adrienne Shores said the Little Free Libraries are also helping engage the community in new ways.

Throughout the past two years, the library has made some big improvements. Along with a renovation that was completed in 2016, the library joined a consortium to increase access to resources. Shores said the Little Free Libraries are an extension to those additions.

"We want to use this as a tool



Support Services Manager Hayley Tracy-Bursley stands with six Little Free Libraries that will be placed at various locations around town and stocked with books.

Becky Meziere, Times-Gazette.com

to say, 'Hey, the library has changed. You can use this as a way of borrowing books,'" Shores said. "... We also want to encourage people to come in and use our facilities, too."

"We have always offered a lot," she continued. "I think the renovation brought a few changes, but I think it also changed the way we tell people about what we do here."

The vision for the little libraries is to put them in places where children and families would have access to them, so Tracy-Bursley reached out to Ashland City Parks for help.

"Once I explained it to them, they were very excited and supportive," she said, noting the plan is to get the libraries up this spring. "... Their consent really makes the project. Without that, we wouldn't have a place to put them."

Three locations for libraries have been secured so far, including Brookside Main, Brookside West and Cahn Grove. Each Little Free Library will have 15 to 20 books inside, ranging in genre and age group.

An IMPACT Youth Grant from the Ashland County Community Foundation made the libraries possible, along with funding from the Friends of the Ashland Public Library organization.

The completion of the little library boxes was also a commu-



One of the Little Free Libraries

nity effort, as Jim Thomas, who does maintenance at the library, assembled them and students in the summer reading program designed and decorated the libraries. The Friends of the Ashland Public Library will stock the shelves and will also check in on them with the Youth Advi-

sory Council and library's Outreach Department.

"We just want to put books in people's hands," said Lissa Gerwig Lance, the president of the Friends of the Ashland Public Library.

She said the beauty of the Little Free Libraries is that people can keep the books and don't

QUICKLOOK

Inspiration? The Little Free Library Organization is a nationwide nonprofit dedicated to increasing the access to books. Library staffer Hayley Tracy-Bursley was inspired to bring Little Free Libraries to Ashland.

Through the help of a grant from the Ashland County Community Foundation and the Friends of the Ashland Public Library, six Little Free Libraries will be placed across town.

How has it evolved? The Ashland Public Library will use the Little Free Libraries to promote literacy and the love of books in Ashland. The library's staff is dedicated to expanding their reach in the community and the Little Free Library gives another opportunity to provide resources to those who want them.

have to worry about returning them, while community members can stop and see what interests them or leave a book for someone else.

"A big part of literacy is access," Tracy-Bursley said. "... What a fun way to promote that here in Ashland."

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