

CLEAR LAKE SHORES CHILDREN'S LIBRARY: A HISTORY OR: IT TAKES AN ISLAND TOWN TO CREATE A TREASURE

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Amy Harris, then the young mother of Zamira and a resident of Clear Lake Shores, had an idea back in 2003: to begin a lending library for children. There was already a "take one, leave one" library of sorts in the vestibule of City Hall; why not add reading material for children? In typical CLS fashion, and with the approval of the mayor, Kathy McIntyre, Amy spearheaded a move to add children's book shelves to those for adults. But she didn't do it alone.

The Foley family (Kevin and Lisa) donated a shelving unit and many residents (Charlane Wiswell, Leona and Neil Pleasant, Kathy McIntyre, Bettie Jamarik, Mike Bass, Chad and Mischelle Bass, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Binion, John and Linda Galbreath, John and Cheryl Knox, Liz Loynes, Mike O'Neil, Roslyn Pierce, Deb Edwards, and Arline Laughter) donated money. Books were donated (at one time or another) by Blanche Stasny, Ed Michael, Eric Klusendorf, Pamela Linn, Lisa Hardcastle, Kay Remak, Tami Perkins, Robert Peterson, Janna Grub, Pamela Linn, Judy Young, Jennifer Shaw, Randy Gay, Gary and Joyce Groover, and the Carrasco, Foley, Burchfield, Sheaffer/Mitrano families, among others. *Half Price Books* in Webster also made a sizable donation of books, not for the last time. By February, 2004, the number of available books hit 1000. And Lisa Foley did more than donate shelves and books; she was there, according to Amy, "in the beginning and every step of the way."

In November of 2005, when Hurricane Rita threatened, Mayor Kathy McIntyre and Councilwoman Vanessa Hamilton came up with a plan: move all the library books (now numbering in the thousands) into a POD for safekeeping. "Morrow Cummings, his Public Works crew, and resident volunteers successfully carried out the task," according to Harris, and Councilwoman Hamilton and Julie Moncur took on "the mammoth job of re-shelving thousands of books."

When, a year later, it became clear to Amy, Lisa, and the other volunteers that more space was needed, they, along with Mike Bass, approached Mayor Vern Johnson to seek permission to expand. When City Council approved the plan, the work began. Police Chief Shelley and his crew cleared out the former police storage area, and Amy and countless others began to prepare the room on the bottom floor of the city hall/police station building. (A new storage building had been built near Jarboe Park, freeing up the previous storage space.) Home Depot stepped up with donations of materials for shelving, and the heavy lifting began.

Among those who helped donate, sand, cut out, construct, paint, and transport shelving and decorative touches were Lisa Foley, Tina Price, Helle Brown, Tami and Chuck Perkins, Neeltje Burns, Julie Moncur, Pete Carrothers, Arline Laughter, John and Linda Galbreath, Bettie Jamarik, Kathy McIntyre, Mike and Georgie Bass, Stephanie Haynes, Greg Christenson, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Binion, Chad and Mischelle Bass, John and Cheryl Knox, Liz Loynes, Mike O'Neal, Allan Batchelor, Roselyn Pierce, Leona Pleasant, Charlane Wiswell, Nancy Schwartz, Chuck Perkins, Al Burns, and David Ryden.

It seemed at one point that the whole island was involved. Area seamstresses including Julie Moncur, Cindy Walbe, Misty Day, Nikki Binion, and Susan Perez, sewed shopping bags to sell at the Farmer's Market to benefit the library. And of special note is the fact that neighborhood children, including Julia Sheaffer, Cami and Clyde Carrasco, Ted and Graham Machin, Lisa's children Teagan and Mick Foley and Amy's children Zamira and Wim Harris-Ryden, painted the striking plywood flowers that still grace the library. And some of those children, particularly Teagan and Mick, continued to help through the years with shelving and re-shelving books.

More books were donated by multitudes including Janna Grubb, the Foleys, the Carrascos, and Tami Perkins, as well as Target, while others did the tedious work of sorting and shelving all of those thousands of books, and finally, in November, 2006, the deed was done.

All was well, with several area volunteers (Tina Price and Lisa Foley's names are mentioned frequently in this regard) periodically shelving and arranging, until Hurricane Ike reared its violent head in 2008. Amy was able to save some of the books, filling her car to capacity as she and her family prepared to evacuate, but many were ruined, which Harris found "most dispiriting." But not a person to remain discouraged for long, Amy re-established the library after George/Jorge (whom she credits with "making the library a reality") cleaned out the mess. By this time the city had formally "adopted" the Children's Library.

To prevent such a loss should another hurricane hit the island, "a 'book evacuation team' was established," with the idea that each of the 100 or so team members would take some of the books home "for safekeeping." By June, 2009, the library was back in action, having been re-built one bay over from its pre-Ike location. Rob Scherer and a crew of CLS volunteers re-built and re-painted, also installing new lights, AC, and a dehumidifier.

Though minor changes, major donations, and continual culling have occurred in the ensuing years, no upheavals in the form of hurricanes or moves have disrupted the operation of the library. Angie Terrell now oversees the library, as Amy no longer lives on the island full time. But Amy is still a part-time island presence, and many remember with appreciation and awe the inspiration, motivation, and perspiration she provided in establishing one of our island treasures, the Clear Lake Shores Children's Library.

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Note: This article was based on the excellent, but perhaps not perfect, recollections of many of those listed herein. If you had a part in the creation and/or running of the Children's Library, but were not named, please forgive us. We appreciate everyone, mentioned or not, who has helped and continues to help.