

By Erich Thurow, Chairman D200 Education Foundation

Students at Prairiewood Elementary puzzled over a mysterious addition to the Learning Resource Center. "It's a house for the shelf elf!" one student surmised. "No, I think it's a bird house," replied a friend. In truth, the small octagonal "building" in the LRC is the school's very own Little Free Library, one of over 15,000 around the world.

Early this school year, Media Specialist Ashley Stoxen wrote a grant proposal to fund the project and the District 200 Education Foundation provided \$261 to the school to build the unique "little" library. Ashley noted that the idea for these Little Free Libraries began in 2009 when Todd Bol of Hudson Wisconsin built a model of his one-room schoolhouse and filled it with books. He put it on a post in his front yard with a sign that read "Free Books."

The idea caught on in Hudson, and with the help of Rick Brooks of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, it quickly spread across the state. Inspired by Andrew Carnegie's support of free public libraries, the take-a-book, leave-a-book concept spread across the nation and eventually across the world. There are Little Free Libraries as far away as Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The organization's mission is "to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide." In August 2012, 18 months ahead of their timeline, they hit their goal of more than 2,500 little libraries.

Prairiewood's LFL, designed by Ms. Stoxen and built by her husband, is modeled after the gazebo in the Woodstock Square. It's built from reclaimed barn wood and according to Ms. Stoxen, "promotes a sense of community for the students who are working on the project."

For now the Little Library is housed in the school's LRC, but later this spring it will be moved to the front lawn of the school. "Families will be able to access the books seven days a week, 24 hours a day," said Ashley Stoxen, "even during the summer months." The project was started with 20 books that were donated after a recent book fair, and students immediately began trading gently used books brought from home

Foundation funds are being used to weatherproof the gazebo library and it will be mounted on a fence post anchored in cement. Additional funds will be used to purchase new books to keep the program running and for upkeep of the little building.

This is just one of the 80 projects the Education Foundation funded in whole or in part this year. Last month the Foundation hosted another successful fundraiser dinner/auction that brought in just short of \$25,000. Those funds will be used for next fall's project. Thank you so much to the volunteers on the Foundation, the staff and administration of District 200 for all they did to make our event a success; thanks as well to the 250 community members who came to the event and opened their wallets for the kids of District 200.