Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 29 June 2018 04:30



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Little Free Library is open.

Located across Wells Fargo Bank in Window Rock between Cocina de Dominguez and Mikasa 2, the non-descript book exchange box bookended by two black benches and newly-planted trees marking the library location contains books that may be read or taken.

People can also replenish the free library with books.

The June 21 ribbon cutting ceremony for the Little Free Library brought together educators, students and community members to commemorate the occasion.

Several dignitaries were also in attendance, including Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Miss Navajo Nation Crystal Littleben and Dr. Tommy Lewis, Superintendent of Department of Diné Education.

Duane Yazzie, Teacher-Librarian for Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta', the Window Rock Unified School District No. 8 immersion school, spearheaded the Little Free Library.

Four students – Arianna Begay, Jade Foster, Corey Owens and Christina Yazzie – rising seventh graders at Tsehootsooi Middle School, assisted him with the project.

The Little Free Library belongs to everyone and the books are always free. If you see a book that you like, take it. Some books may include a personal message from the previous owner. You can include your own note when you pass the book on.

"I was lucky this year to work with a group of young ladies and we talked about reading, writing and communication," Yazzie said.

He said the seed for the project was planted during a visit to Boston one summer.

"Being the tourist that I am, I was walking around, doing all of my sightseeing. I was at an intersection and there was this little book box and it looked similar to this," he said. "It said take a book, return a book."

Yazzie wound up taking three books, including a novel idea planted in his heart to empower his community and Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'.

Window Rock, Ariz. is now among the 75,000 Little Free Libraries located across the globe. The nearest Little Free Library is in Gallup, N.M., near the downtown area.

Yazzie and his students began the project in earnest by writing letters to the members of the Northern Arizona Reading Council. He is a member of the council as well as the Arizona Reading Association.

During one of the council meetings, Yazzie spoke to members about his students and the project they were undertaking.

"They jumped on board. They said, 'We want to buy that book box for them, we want to get them started.' It's all about teamwork," he said. "It's about community. It's about relationships."

The meeting was held in Flagstaff, which has several Little Free Libraries dotted throughout town. Yazzie drove around town and took pictures of the various types of book boxes for ideas.

He said the worldwide literacy initiative doesn't stop here. Establishing Little Free Libraries at Ft. Defiance, Sawmill, Crystal, St. Michaels, Oak Springs and other locations across the Navajo Nation is the logical next step.

"We are going to continue to beautify the (Little Free Library) area so that it's a place that people want to come to just sit and read. Anyone and everyone are welcome," he said.

For people interested in contributing books, please deliver them to Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta' in Window Rock. They will replenish the library as needed.

Dr. Audra Platero, Principal of Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta', provided the welcome address in Navajo.

"I just want to say a big thank you. What a happy celebration for those living here and our children for organizing this work," she said.

Platero said the trees that were planted and the kiosk and benches are a source of pride for the community, adding that they must be properly cared for and protected.

"We ask that you take part in providing a book, taking a book, taking care of this tremendous effort that our students and community have been involved in to bring this to Window Rock," she said.

Community definitely was at the heart of the project and establishing the Little Free Library would not have been possible without the help of local businesses.

Nathan Begay, CEO of Navajo Nation Shopping Centers, Inc. said they were happy to help.

"We have Wells Fargo over here, Dominguez restaurant and Mikasa. I wanted to acknowledge them," he said.

Mikasa and Dominguez donated trees. Ace Hardware and NNSC donated benches.

"We're proud of what's happening here. This is probably the world's biggest tiniest project," he said before donating a book titled, "The ABC's of Empowered Teens: Building Blocks for Success."

WRUSD Superintendent Lynnette Michalski was not able to attend the event, but she said the Little Free Library was further evidence of "Bikáá Hadiikah," the school district's effort to overcome challenges and rise to excellence for the community and stakeholders.

She said WRUSD serves more than 30,000 people in the area and surrounding communities.

These types of partnerships allow the district to provide positive educational outcomes for students, Michalski said, adding that collaborations with other school districts are also underway.

Reading is the foundation for this knowledge.

"Reading is the lifeblood of existence and it creates independence. When a person reads, they can travel and experience new things and meet new people," she said.

Michalski will be donating books from her personal bookshelf to the Little Free Library.

"I commend the student council of Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta', Mr. Yazzie, Dr. Platero and Navajo Nation Shopping Center for working together on this incredible initiative," she said. "Congratulations!"

Information: ***www.littlefreelibrary.org***