



Little Free Library designers, builders, and stewards. Top row, left to right: (1) Sandy and Patrick Tilcock. (2) Dick and Kay Hilsenkopf. Bottom row: (1) Shane McCloskey, Mark Young, Susan Hirata. (2) Ian and Cameron.

Little free libraries

“Take a book. Return a book”: It’s a suggestion. It’s a values statement. It’s a reflection of untold daily transactions occurring across Eugene-Springfield neighborhoods.

It’s also the driving slogan behind Little Free Library (LFL), a trending, worldwide nonprofit organization with plenty of local advocates and promoters.

In its most basic form, a Little Free Library is a box full of reading materials, a place where anyone can drop by to pick up a book (or two) and bring back another to share. At last count, there were upwards of three dozen, maybe four, LFLs across Lane County. You’ve probably spotted a few.

Typically, LFLs look like miniature houses mounted on posts. Others take on more intriguing forms; they can resemble barns, castles, microwave ovens, toolboxes, or time machines. Around Eugene, LFLs are most often found in front of neighborhood homes, but it’s not unusual to find them in parks, community gardens, or businesses. Most have a designated steward, also known as a librarian.

Susan Hirata stewards an LFL near downtown Eugene. Her library has become a popular stop-off for neighborhood

pedestrians. Hirata read about LFLs in *Sunset Magazine* and encouraged her architect husband, Mark, to design a library box; he produced something he calls “simple and cute, but not housey.” Neighbors contributed the woodworking skills and materials. Hirata provides the hands-off caretaking style. “I just try to make sure it looks okay,” she says. “It works better when it’s kind of run by everybody who uses it.”

North Eugene is home to the TARDIS library—as in, a replica of the phone booth/time machine/spacecraft from the British sci-fi television series *Doctor Who*. The local TARDIS LFL is stewarded by 13-year-old Cam and his 11-year-old brother, Ian. It was built from recycled cabinet materials, and gifted to them by their stepdad. And just like its *Doctor Who* namesake, Ian claims, his TARDIS “is bigger on the inside.” Cam puts it another way: “Books take you to whole new worlds.”

Little Free Libraries. Today might be a good day to visit one. Or maybe even create one!

littlefreelibrary.org