

## Little Free Library is a great, big idea in little, tiny space

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**Abstract:** Since it was placed on the edge of their front yard at the end of March, Ramey said there have been people of all ages dropping by to grab something to read and leaving books to share with others.

**Full text:** DANIELLE PETERSON / Statesman Journal

From a distance, the small brightly painted structure perched on the edge of a lawn on Summer Street SE looks like a doll house.

DANIELLE PETERSON / Statesman Journal

But on closer inspection, passers-by will see written on top of a small glass door the words "Little Free Library."

The pint-sized book repository is the first officially registered Little Free Library to pop up in Salem.

Jessica Ramey, the LFL steward, said her husband read about the program that is growing worldwide, and after additional research they decided to start one. They helped stock it with some new and used books originally.

"We thought, we need this in our neighborhood," Ramey said.

They asked their neighbors and a handful of families jumped on board to make the idea a reality.

Little Free Library is a nonprofit organization based in Wisconsin that was formed in 2009. The group's mission is to promote literacy, build a sense of community and share skills and creativity around the world. It started with a small one-room red school house built by Todd Bol as a memorial to his mother. Bol placed books in it for local residents to enjoy and the idea grew from there.

Little Free Libraries have popped up around the world and dozens have been started in Oregon already, with a majority of them in Portland. The Summer Street Little Free Library is the first known one in Salem.

Mike Grimshaw, who lives on Summer Street SE and is a local contractor, helped build it. Grimshaw said a friend had built the original box for a kitchen station that was used on back pack trips.

"We cut the sides and put a roof on it," he said, to make it work for the little library.

Meanwhile other families, including Jennifer Gibson-Millis' family, helped decorate it.

"We had such a fun time," Gibson-Millis said. "It made us stop and turn off our computers."

Since it was placed on the edge of their front yard at the end of March, Ramey said there have been people of all ages dropping by to grab something to read and leaving books to share with others.

Sonja Somerville, the Salem Public Library teen services librarian, heard about the program from Ramey.

She was immediately hooked, and when her husband asked what she wanted for her birthday, she had an answer even though she typically says she doesn't want anything. This time, she was quick to pipe up that she wanted a Little Free Library.

"It's such a perfect idea," Somerville said.

Even though Somerville works with books on a daily basis, she said having the library on her property in West Salem seems like a fun way to get to know her neighbors. It will be the second LFL in Salem and the first in West Salem.

"I can't say I ever get very far from thinking about books and reading (anyway)," she said.

The project has become a family and neighborhood affair. Somerville's family and some friends got together to decorate her two-tiered bitty building.

Another group in West Salem is also in the process of launching a Little Free Library.

Tawnie Wong, a member of the West Salem MOMS Club, is hoping to get the group to start one as a service project soon.

"We're really excited to see these popping up in Salem," Wong said.

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Little Free Library

South Salem: 2055 Summer Street SE; listed on the LFL website

West Salem: Woodhill Street NW

More information: Visit [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org) for more information about the program and to see a map for registered free libraries in the area.

For folks with no building skillsThe Little Free Library organization sells a variety of wooden library boxes for individuals or neighborhoods who want to start their own version of LFL. There are many styles including one that resembles the iconic red British telephone booth. They range in price from \$250 to \$629.95.

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