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Buy the Book

How Tillsonburg's love of
reading is changing lives
around the world



A holiday transformation

The volunteers who deck Annandale's halls





BUY THE BOOK

How Tillsonburg's love of reading is changing the world

It's late afternoon and a crisp autumn wind is swirling behind the Tillsonburg Town Centre mall. On the sidewalk, a half a dozen high school students are milling around expectantly. With a low rumble, a U-Haul truck pulls up to the curb. The student volunteers leap into action, pulling oddly-shaped boxes from the back of the truck and ferrying them into the mall's centre court.

For book lovers, the sight is as welcome as the arrival of Santa's overstuffed sleigh at Christmas.

"We've been doing the Rotary Used Book Sale for about 30 years now," says Tillsonburg Rotary Club member Ken Patterson. "Although we don't officially open until tomorrow morning, as soon as we open the boxes, people start buying."

Sure enough, a crowd of curious shoppers is already perusing the first few tables.

"We have about 500 boxes



Retired elementary school teacher Susan Barker-James volunteers every Wednesday at Fernlea IVIX Books. Sales at the shop help support two schools in Fort Liberte, Haiti.



of books this year,” explains fellow Rotarian and book sale organizer Bob Aykroyd. “Anything that’s left over after the sale will go back into storage for our next sale, or be donated to other organizations.”

Historically a three-day event held each fall, the book sale is one of two major fundraisers organized by Rotary.

“Profits from the book sale support Rotary International projects including an e-learning program in India, microloans in Honduras and the Polio Plus vaccine program,” explains club

(Top) Shoppers peruse the offerings at the annual October book sale

(Right) Rotarians Bob Aykroyd and Keith Hodkinson work the checkout line



president Dave Rushton. “Our other major fundraiser is our Trip-of-the-Month draw. We sell tickets for that in partnership with the local historical society and use the proceeds for local projects, including youth scholarships and improvements to Memorial Park.”

The selection of books available at the book sale is impressive, spanning practically every category and interest. In fact, sales have gone so well in recent years, that the club is planning to add a second sale in the spring.

“We have novels, cook books, history books, biographies, children’s books, gardening books, bibles — just about everything you can think of,” says Ken. “Some customers will come back two and three times before it’s over.”

“We’re constantly putting out

more books, and the prices are really reasonable,” adds Bob. “Then on the last day, we give people a chance to fill a whole bag for \$5.”

One of the Rotary Club’s regular book sale customers is Bernie Crawshaw, the visionary octogenarian behind Fernlea IVIX Non-Profit Books just east

of Courtland.

“It’s great,” says Bernie, loading a stack of near-new novels into a shopping cart. “I’m able to pick up stock for the store at a reasonable cost, as well as donate some of our older stock back. It’s a win for everyone.”

Established in 1990 by Bernie and his wife Pat, Fernlea IVIX Books stocks approximately 25,000 used books in 46 categories at its motel-turned-bookstore. Blessed to have low overhead and a prime location on Highway 3, the store has been remarkably successful.

“We send about \$30,000 each year to support two schools in Fort Liberte, Haiti,” Bernie explains. “We’ve been so fortunate. People are really generous with both their time and their books. When customers visit the store, they can see pictures of what their purchases are accomplishing in Haiti, and read updates on the various projects.”

Over the years, profits from the store have been used to purchase doors, windows and toilets for the schools, not to mention books, computers and even a soccer field.

“We sell newer books in all categories, but what we’re really known for is our fiction,” says Bernie. “We only stock popular fiction that’s less than six years old. There’s a real market for that.”

Rotary book sale customer Susan Barker-James not only shops at Fernlea IVIX throughout the year, she also volunteers to



(Top) Bernie Crawshaw, founder of Fernlea IVIX Books east of Courtland

(Left) Some of the students in Fort Liberte, Haiti, supported by Fernlea IVIX

staff the store each Wednesday.

"I love books. Every time I go to work, I come home with a book," she laughs. "And, of course, I'm finding lots of good stuff here today, too."

A retired teacher, Susan began volunteering at Fernlea about two years ago after her husband Robin unexpectedly passed away.

"It gets me out of the house and I really enjoy the people," she says. "They're so interesting and I'm able to recommend authors to them. People come from London, Hamilton...all over really."

Although e-readers and tablets have definitely changed the way Canadians read in recent years, Bernie, Susan and the book sale volunteers believe there's still a market for traditional books—especially if the price is right.

"A lot of people still like holding a book in their hands, and they like the idea that their spending is supporting something good," says Dave. "Buying and reading a book online is convenient, but there's something to be said for the thrill of the hunt and those serendipitous finds."

"We see families come in and the kids carrying books around like they're gold. We get collectors coming through, seasonal farm workers, people who are looking for one or two particular authors—we see it all," Bob says.

The Rotary Club's efforts to promote literacy aren't limited to the annual book fair, however.

Fernlea IVIX Books is located in a former motel on Highway 3, just east of Courtland. The store is renowned for its selection of recent popular fiction.



“We handed out free books to kids at the Turtlefest Block Party this summer and support a free online reading program as well,” says Dave.

In addition, the Rotary Club of Tillsonburg provides free dictionaries to grade 3 students at area schools.

As for the teenagers who help unload the books each year, they’re all members of the Rotary Interact Club at Glendale High School.

“There are about 30 kids who are involved with that and they do a lot of their own projects,” says Dave. “Some of the students may go on to other Rotary programs, like our international youth exchanges, but ultimately, they’re learning to live out the Rotary motto: service above self.”

Jason Weiler, one of Tillsonburg’s newest Rotarians, says he chose to get involved in Rotary specifically because of its outward focus.

“Some service clubs seem more social than socially-conscious,” he says. “Rotary gives me an opportunity to give back to the community in a meaningful way.”

Dave admits getting people to join Rotary isn’t as easy as it once was, but after several years of declining membership, the club is growing again.

“We’re always looking for members—and if they’re young enough to carry boxes of books, that’s even better,” he laughs.

The next Rotary Book Fair will take place April 25-29, 2019 at the Tillsonburg Town Centre (200 Broadway).



The Tillsonburg Rotary Club gave out free books at the Turtlefest Downtown Block Party. Pictured are Bob Aykroyd, Jason Weiler, Jim Donaldson, John Gilvsey, Dave Rushton, Sandra Gilvesy and John Lohuis.



The Rotary Club of Tillsonburg

There are currently 1.2 million Rotary Club members worldwide

Rotary is where neighbors, friends, and problem-solvers share ideas, join leaders, and take action to create lasting change

The Rotary Club of Tillsonburg was chartered on June 9, 1950

Long-time Rotarian John Gilvsey is currently Governor of District 7080, an area that stretches from Ingersoll to Toronto

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