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Young authors shine at Shrewsbury Library Summer Kickoff



David T. Lee Photo by Tanya Kawecki

Excitement was in the air at the Shrewsbury Public Library last Friday as hundreds of Shrewsbury residents dropped in from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. to celebrate the start of the library's annual summer reading program.

The library's Summer Kickoff featured games, crafts, performers, raffles, book giveaways, free ice cream, an inflatable castle and slide, and local youth author meet-and-greets. The theme for this year's event was "superheroes," which were featured in the traditional sense of comic books and movies, but were also represented realistically.

Young Adult Librarian and Volunteer Coordinator Daniel Barbour said that the “everyday hero” they chose for this year’s theme was Pakistani activist and human rights advocate Malala Yousafzi.

“We’re having a one-read on the book ‘I am Malala.’ We’re doing adult book groups, a teen book breakfast, and children’s book groups,” Barbour said. “There’s a children’s edition, a very simple, tame story version of it that they’re going to do in the children’s room for younger kids. We’re trying to connect everyone, bring everyone together around that everyday hero in Malala.”

A particularly impressive highlight of Friday's event was the youth authors featured there. Kash Jain and Tanner Walling, both 13, are local residents, friends, accomplished fiction writers and co-founders of DarkSpace Publishing.

While Jain said he tends to write science fiction, Walling said he writes disaster thrillers and science fiction novels for young adult audiences. Walling’s first book, “Fury Of The Storm,” is intended for ages 10 and up and it will be coming out this summer, he said.

“What happens in ‘Fury of the Storm,’” said Walling, “is that Isaac is the main character, and him and his sister Rebecca are on their way back home from Houston to Cambridge in their private jet and that jet ends up crashing in the largest hurricane to ever happen. Then they have to survive through the hurricane and get to the mainland where they can be rescued.”

In addition to writing books and content for Science All Around, his science and technology blog at <http://scienceallaround.weebly.com>, Walling said he also programs games and simulations.

Jain said his first book, *The Machine*, is based on a nightmare he once had.

“It’s about this kid named Atlas,” Jain said. “He’s the main character; most of the book is in his perspective. Atlas basically gets trapped with a bunch of people at a planetarium opening. And the planetarium is built on an ancient lab from this evil scientist guy. Everybody there gets trapped in this strange, alternate dimension. It’s full of caves, lava, and strange, genetically modified monsters.”

Jain said that an active blog, publishing and contact information, as well as descriptions of all of their books are available at DarkSpace Publishing’s website, www.darkspacepublishing.weebly.com.

Standing at the booth next to DarkSpace Publishing was 11-year-old David T. Lee. Lee said writes and illustrates his own books using Microsoft Word and Photoshop Elements. Lee published his first book, “Danny and the Portal of the World” at age seven, and said his three-book series “The Adventures of Danny Hoopenbiller” is now in the Library of Congress.

“I’ve had a history of doing promotions and events,” said Lee. “I started at the library, the old location, at the library events. And then I started joining book events at my school. I actually have a letter from president Barack Obama complimenting my books.”

One letter he did not bring to showcase that day was from State Representative Hannah Kane, who Lee said had also complimented his writing.

Lee said the Danny series will feature two more books: one coming out this summer, and the last coming out next summer. He added that his future plans include writing single, non-sequential novels.

Lee said he maintains an active blog called Books “R” Fun at <http://booksrfun.infomages.com>, where he posts one or two articles per month along with some photos, and more information about his books can be found.

Proud father, Sam Lee, was with his son at the event. He said his son’s books are purchased from all over the world via Amazon and Barnes And Noble online.

“He actually gets some occasional online sales from Japan, Germany, India.... He gets some from Australia—he is really encouraged by that,” said Mr. Lee.

Friday's festivities showed no sign of slowing as the afternoon pushed on. Barbour deemed the event a success based on the number of people that he had already seen by mid-day.

“Based on the 250 children’s packets gone and the amount of teens I’ve seen, and then the parents and the grandparents, that have come, I would say we’ve passed 500 easily so far. It may be a lot more,” he said.

Barbour also had a message for anyone who could not go to the event:

“Just because you missed today’s event, doesn’t mean you can’t be active in the library this summer. We have our prize giveaways for the teens, and the children haven’t even begun yet. So if you missed the event and are sad about that... you can still enter into these programs. You just have to come to the library and get your information for the appropriate age.”

For those seeking more information, Barbour said, it should be noted that he manages programs for children in grades 5-12; parents and guardians of younger children can talk to Head of Children’s Services Sharon Martin; and adults can talk to Reference Librarian Walker Evans.

<http://shrewsbury.wickedlocal.com/article/20150701/NEWS/150709185>