



# LITTLE LIBRARIES

## BRING WONDER OF READING TO STUDENTS WHO NEED BOOKS

Maya Washburn Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

**L**AKE PARK – Have you noticed red birdhouse-like boxes of books sitting outside schools? • They are there because of Emily Schachtel, a life coach from Palm Beach Gardens who envisions a world where all children have access to free books – to treasures like “Charlotte’s Web” and “Goodnight Moon.” • Schachtel has installed little libraries – cabinets with doors full of new or gently used children’s books both in English and Spanish – at Title One elementary schools throughout the county over the past four years.

“When I go to these schools, kids ask, ‘This is for us? And it’s free?’” said Schachtel, 48, outside a little library at Lake Park Elementary School. “They love it. We encourage them to create little libraries in their home so they have books there.”

She has installed little libraries at 20 schools totaling about 13,000 students so far with the help of the Junior League of the Palm Beaches, an all-women community service nonprofit.



Junior League of the Palm Beaches Little Library Chair Emily Schachtel, left, of Palm Beach Gardens and Maria Pumarejo, president-elect of the Junior League of the Palm Beaches, of West Palm Beach at Lake Park Elementary School in Lake Park in December 2024. THOMAS CORDY/THE PALM BEACH POST; AND GETTY IMAGES

Many students at Lake Park Elementary don’t have any books at home, said Lori Cayea, an administrative assistant there.

“Our parents are economically challenged,” said Cayea, who lives in West Palm Beach. “Books are not on the list of what they’re going to buy. It’s diapers, formula, food and housing first.”

She encourages students to exchange books at the little library or just take books to keep.

“When children have books in their hand, whether they can read or not, it just opens up so much more for them,” Cayea said.

Schachtel and other Junior League members came up with the idea of donating little libraries to schools in 2020 during COVID-19 shutdowns. They wanted to reach kids who lost access to books in person at school.

The program’s setup is simple. Volunteers buy preassembled little library structures through an online small business. They then install them near the front doors of schools, paint them, and leave school staff with boxes of donated books.

The staff at West Palm Beach-based Herdick Brothers Construction started helping install the little libraries in October. Members have made a competition out of who can install them the fastest.

Caitlin Looby, culture coordinator at Herdick Brothers, was part of a team that installed a little library in only 15 minutes at Clifford O. Taylor Elementary School in Palm Springs on Oct. 28.

“We are always looking for more opportunities to give back to our community,” said Looby, 30, of Port St. Lucie. “I didn’t realize that a lot of kids don’t have the opportunity or the funds to get books. This gives them a chance to pick out any level of book for their reading style without potentially being embarrassed.”

Schachtel plans to add little libraries to five more schools next year, including Indian Pines Elementary School west of Lantana, Rosenwald Elementary School in South Bay, and Wynnebrook Elementary School near West Palm Beach.

Junior League volunteers are accepting book donations. Anyone who wants to donate can contact the organization to schedule a pick-up or drop-off or buy books from an Amazon gift list.

“Our goal is to encourage confidence,” said Maria Pumarejo, Junior League of the Palm Beaches president. “A lot of the women we work with have children in their life that they care about. This is a way for us to encourage the next generation.”



### Random act of kindness

Has someone made your day? Tell us about it!

Kindness can be all around us, every day! Being a good Samaritan goes a long way in the community, and we feel that it’s special enough to get shout-outs each week in the latest version of our Sunday newspapers.

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