

Pequot's 45th Book Sale Turns a New Page With Chair and Ideas

BY MICHELE HERRMANN

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John Hartwell may not have any prior experience in running a five-day sale featuring more than 100,000 books, but he is smart enough to ask for extra help.

He is the chair of the 45th annual Pequot Library Book Sale, taking place Friday, July 28 through Tuesday, Aug. 1 on the grounds of the Pequot Library, 720 Pequot Ave., Southport. The sale, which is the major fund raiser for the library, attracts dealers and readers locally and nationally who buy books ranging from collectibles to bargain reads.

Having only been a cashier at two past book sales, Hartwell described himself as being "by far, the least experienced person" at a meeting about organizing the sale last August.

When asked to be chair, Hartwell said he would be "happy to do it" under one condition. "I truly did not have the knowledge or the experience of what goes on, so I said I would do it if we had a committee," he explained.

Hartwell said he accepted his job because he thinks the library is "a fantastic resource in the community." He added that he thought this would be a way for him to give back. For Hartwell, being chair has been a lot of fun: seeing if changes can be made to sale operations and, at the same time, understanding why long-time ways of doing things still work.

During a setup for the sale last week, he pointed out large wooden planks that were lying under sales tables. He explained that the planks hold boxes of additional books that cannot fit on to tables just yet. In the case of rain, the planks keep the boxes and books from getting wet.

"I think my main contribution is to come in with a fresh eye and say, 'why is this done this way,' and often it's done that way because that's the way it needs to be done," Hartwell said.

A new feature this year is a "Young Readers Day" Sunday, July 30, beginning at 9 a.m. Book sale committee member Paige Gillies, who works in the book business, secured donations of like-new children's books from publishing companies. They include classics and new titles. These books will only be available on Sunday and will be housed in a separate tent. The first 200 children who come to "Young Readers Day" will receive a voucher for a free

book.

"Young Readers Day" will also feature a children's concert led by MaryAnn Hall at 1 p.m. Hall is the head of Music for Children, a child-centered music program. At 2 p.m., Creative Castles, a business on Old Post Road, will present a children's art workshop. Volunteer Ruth Frantz organized these additional events.

As contacting publishers for children's books is a novel idea this year, books that are for sale at Pequot come largely by donations that occur year-round.

Volunteers serve as "sorters," going through donations and then placing them on shelves listed by category in a sorting room in the library's lower level. "Pricers," as their title says, put a price on a book.

A group of volunteers continues to come year after year to help out, some of which have been with the sale for more than 20 years, Hartwell said. For those who handle donations annually, their work begins in September. For this year's book sale, they closed up the sorting room last week.

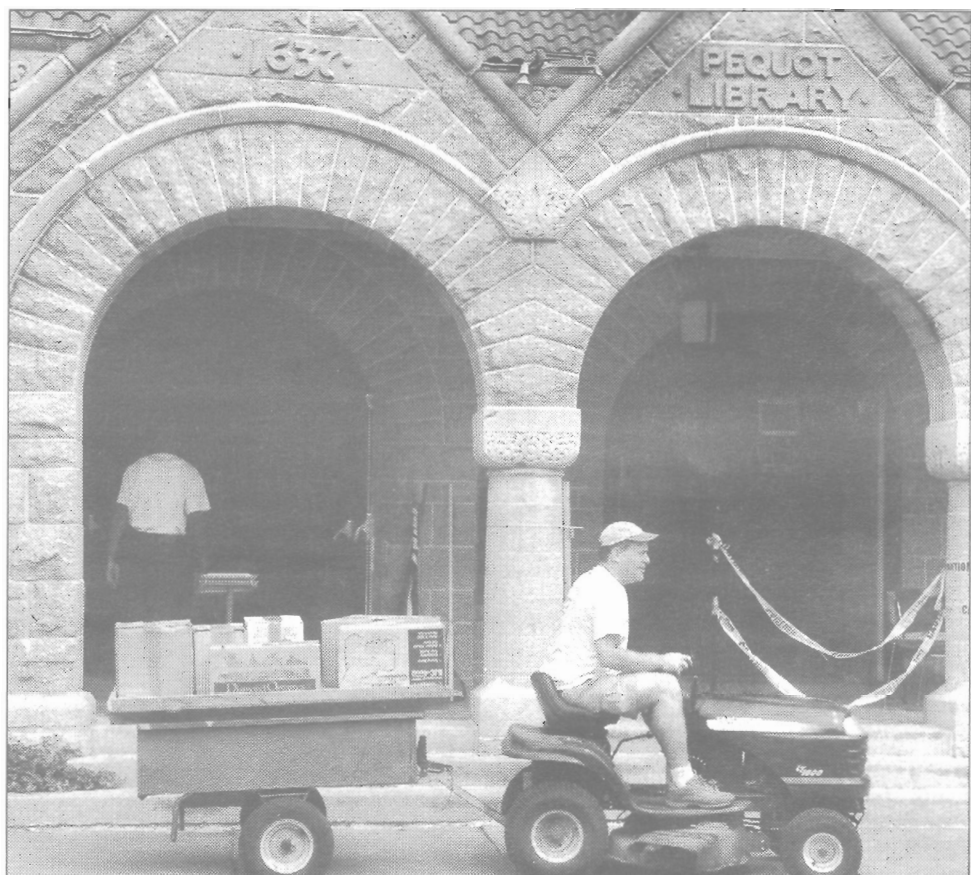
Despite having to work around construction on Pequot Library's building, a restoration project that has been under way, sale preparations have been successful.

"We were able to process as many books as we did in our best year, which was two years ago," Hartwell said. "We already have a backlog of books to start processing in September, when we are ready to go again."

Volunteers have sorted books into more than 40 different categories for sale in a large tent set up on the library grounds and inside its air-conditioned auditorium. Interests include fiction, mystery, cooking, travel, sports, biography, classics, performing arts, history and gardening. Books on tape, CDs and albums are included.

Every year, a number of books of special interest are set aside because of their rarity or value. There are more than 290 "Specials" this year. They include a rare first edition/first printing of *Ben Hur*; a mid-19th century French travel book on India; an 1892 edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*; paperbacks from the 1940s to the '60s; and the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, produced between 1910 and 1911.

Pequot Library Executive Director Dan Snyder said he is impressed by the generosity of book donors who give year in



FAIRFIELD CITIZEN-NEWS photos / Tracy Deer

Doug Fried of Southport, above, whizzed by the well-known arches of the Pequot Library in Southport with a cart full of books in tow while setting up for the library's 45th annual book sale which starts this Friday, July 28. Below, volunteers, front row from left, Stephanie Weaver of Stratford, Bob Repko of Southport and Gene Karpinski of Southport worked hard to unload boxes of books. In back, from left, were volunteers Bill Weathered of Fairfield and Jim Fast of Southport.

and year out – “those anonymous people are really behind the success of the book sale.” – and the library's staff and volunteers who give their time.

More than 60 book sale volunteers help out year-round. In turn, the sale's proceeds make up about 15 percent of the library's operating budget.

“It's a real sense of community,” Snyder said. “It's a real sense of everybody pulling together.”

The library's restoration project is to be completed by the end of August, according to Snyder. An art show celebrating the completion will take place Columbus Day Weekend.

Another book sale tradition is a program that provides vouchers to teachers to buy books for classroom use or to give to their students. Made possible by a grant from the Rene B. Fisher Foundation, the program will provide vouchers in the amount of \$100 to Bridgeport and New Haven public school teachers.

There will be 120 teachers participating this year, according to Lori Hashizume, who is overseeing this year's program.

“They have been thrilled,” said Hashizume about the teachers coming to the sale. “If their students perform well,

they might get a book at the end of the year as a gift... they also encourage reading outside of school, so they will let the kids borrow books to take them home.”

Hashizume, a Southporter who co-chaired the book sale with her husband, Doug Fried, for the past five years, first met Hartwell about three years ago when he and his wife, Janet, noticed the tents set up for the book sale while driving along.

The Hartwells had just moved to Southport. “Lori asked us if we wanted to help,” Hartwell remembered. “We said we were still unpacking at our house [but] we'll be back.”

At that time, Hashizume ended up getting empty moving boxes. “So, we made a mental note. Aha, we could ask him a few years from now,” she said.

Hours for Pequot Library Book Sale are as follows: Friday, July 28, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Books are double the marked price. Saturday and Sunday, July 29 and 30, from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Book prices are as marked. Monday, July 31, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Books are at half price. Tuesday, Aug. 1, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. All items are free. Visa, Mastercard, Discover and American Express are accepted. Call the library at 259-0346 or visit www.pequotlibrary.com.