

Right, librarian Judy Bane reshelves one of the more than 2,000 books inside the bookmobile she drives to communities in Klickitat County.

Below, the regional library district's bookmobile parks across from the Odd Fellows lodge on East Market Street in Bickleton.



Drive-Through Convenience

Bookmobile's arrival to small towns brings reading material and social gathering place



By Jeanie Senior

It is no surprise that after 22 years as the main driver of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District Bookmobile, librarian Judy Bane has a lot of friends.

It is one of the many perks of Judy's job that kids who grew up using the bookmobile now bring their families to get books. Others come to visit when they are home from college.

When she opened a Facebook account earlier this year, her tally of friends quickly climbed to 300, most of them young people who knew Judy through the library or bookmobile.

"Young friends, they just include me in everything," Judy says. "I haven't gone hunting for any friends."

Driving the bookmobile to some of Klickitat County's

more remote locations—Roosevelt to Appleton, Bickleton to Alderdale—Judy encounters farm folks who have been friends with her for years.

"We all kind of act like a big family," she says.

In Bickleton, when Myrna Giles comes to the bookmobile to return books and check out new ones, Judy laughs as she hands the books back to Myrna.

"We've known each other so long I've got her number memorized," she says.

Judy drives the bookmobile two days a week and works at the Goldendale Community Library three days. Another librarian, Susan Kerwin, also is a driver.

The bookmobile's shelves hold more than 2,000 books.

Before Judy takes the vehicle on the road, she stocks its shelves.

"Mostly basics," she says, "but after all these years, I pretty well know what my people check out. There's a little bit of almost everything. If I don't have it, I will mail it, or bring it back the next time. I do a lot of that. I have regulars and I know what they like. If I'm asked for a book, I will find it."

The bookmobile is equipped with a satellite system that lets the librarian aboard connect to the Fort Vancouver Regional Library catalog system to check out books, search for books or notify Judy when another branch has a hold on a book she checks in.

Another perk of her job is "I read a lot—10 to 12 hardbacks a week, probably 20 paperbacks," she says, adding with a grin, "I have to read all these books."

Judy loves to talk about favorite authors, including Mary Balogh, Robert Parker, Stuart Woods, Nora Roberts, Robert Parker and Janet Evanovich.

"Suzanne Brockmann—good stories, well told," Judy says.

Author Sharyn McCrumb, whose books are set in Appalachia, gave Judy insight into her late husband, Everette Bane.

"His people came from the Appalachians and Sharyn made me understand him," says Judy, who is always eager to find new authors she enjoys so she can share them with library patrons.

Her love of sharing with the community is a tribute to Judy's small-town upbringing.

"When I was born in the hospital in Goldendale, my husband's little brother (also a newborn) was in the nursery with me for two days," she recalls.

Judy grew up on the family farm near Centerville, and jokes that she left home to get away from driving a wheat truck. When she was hired at the library in 1987, it was her truck driving experience that got her the bookmobile job.

She called her father and said, "Dad, I can't believe it, wheat truck driving finally came in handy," a comment he countered with, "all those times I told you to put down that book and go play with the other kids ..."

Judy rarely misses a bookmobile round unless the roads are icy. In bad weather, she doesn't want young mothers or seniors trying to navigate the roads to meet up with the bookmobile.

The number of patrons who use the bookmobile varies from community to community.

"At Dallesport school during the school year we can have 70 to 100 in two hours," Judy says. "There are about 30 people from Dallesport that faithfully come on the bus" year round.

The bookmobile's stop in Timber Valley, a community above Appleton, is under the area's biggest pine tree.

"We've got regulars up there," Judy says. "There may be only three or four, but boy they're regulars."



Bookmobile patrons Joseph Cummings, Janet Brown and Joshua Cummings find something to read. Librarian Susan Kerwin is seated in the back.

People who live by choice in isolated areas of Klickitat County seem to value the human contact the bookmobile provides.

"Mostly it's getting something to read, but part of it is the social aspect," Judy says.

Judy says she likes the balance in her work: two days on the road, three days in the library, where "there's always somebody with a new, interesting question."

"It's really interesting to work in an atmosphere where there's new technology all the time, learning new things," she says. "I like to help people. It's a joyous thing for me to help people. This is, for me, an ideal job." ■

The Goldendale-Klickitat bookmobile schedule is published at the Fort Vancouver Regional Library website, www.fvrl.org. Some of Judy's stories, with photos, are published on the website www.fvrl.org/aboutus/files/BookmobileAdventures.htm.