

bucketlist

Run a Little Free Library

Share a book, take a book, meet your neighbors

BY LIZA N. BURBY
Special to Newsday

Six months after Robyn Bonavita and her husband, Rocco, moved into their new home in North Bellmore in 2024, she found a way to combine her love of reading with meeting her new neighbors. Bonavita set up Robyn's Little Free Library, a book-sharing box on her front lawn where adults and kids can borrow or donate free books.

"I've gotten to know who the readers in the neighborhood are, which is super exciting because then you have someone to talk about books with," said Bonavita, 47, a former teacher, who has a book-themed Instagram account.

Robyn's Little Free Library, which Rocco Bonavita repurposed from a kitchen cabinet with shingles to match their home, is on a pole near the sidewalk. It's 20-by-30 inches, and two shelves accommodate 60 books for adults and children. It's registered with Little Free Library, an international

People tell me they'll take walks past my house with their kids so that they can see what's in the library.'

— Robyn Bonavita, of North Bellmore

book-sharing nonprofit based in St. Paul, Minnesota.

"We provide greater, more equitable book access in neighborhoods worldwide," said Sarah Howd, the organization's administrative assistant.

Howd said that since the group became a nonprofit in 2012 it has issued more than 200,000 new libraries, also called charters. Registered libraries have a metal sign that reads "Little Free Library" with the charter number. A charter gives library owners — called stewards — the option to have it included on a world map to help patrons find and share books. Howd said they also partner with publishers and bookstores for monthly giveaways and so stewards can get free books.

The idea is that stewards will initially stock their libraries with books for adults, children or both, and then people will donate their own.

"Most stewards find that over time it can become self-sustaining," Howd said.

■ COST

■ Visit littlefreelibrary.org to purchase kits starting at \$189.95. Materials like a post and latch are additional. Blueprints and plans are also available on the website.

■ Build one on a budget using materials from garage sales or antique shops. For ideas, check out the Shoestring Budget blog entry at littlefreelibrary.org.

■ HOW TO REGISTER

If you buy a kit, it automatically comes registered with a charter sign included. If you build your own book-sharing box, register by buying a charter sign, which starts at about \$50. Visit littlefreelibrary.org/stewards/registration..

\$50



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Robyn Bonavita's husband, Rocco, built their book-sharing box to match their house. Little Free Library, an international nonprofit, also sells kits and offers guidance.

If you want to start your own, Howd said to first identify an accessible location on your property, like near the curb. She recommends checking with your local zoning office to make sure there are no setback or other restrictions.

Bonavita checks hers every day and

adds new books at least once a week. "It's been an amazing experience because people tell me they'll take walks past my house with their kids so that they can see what's in the library," she said.

Want to find a Little Free Library near you? Try the Little Free Library mobile app.

■ WHERE TO GET BOOKS

The organization has resources on its site. Howd said you can get donations from book groups, family and friends. Bonavita advises: "For anybody who wants to start it, who might be hesitant because they're worried about filling it up, most libraries have discarded books you can buy for 25 cents to a dollar."

■ GRANT PROGRAMS

Little Free Library offers two grant programs, the Impact Library program that grants Little Free Libraries to communities where book access is scarce, and the Indigenous Library Program, which grants libraries to members of Indigenous communities.



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With a capacity of about 60 books, Robyn Bonavita's Little Free Library is a browser's dream.



DEBBIE EGAN-CHIN

Betty Pasquale, of Oyster Bay, borrows a book and leaves another at a Little Free Library near her home.