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Ginnie Graham: Fan of romance books gets a prize for hitting library milestone

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Michael Mullens (left) receives an Amazon Echo from Central Library manager Buddy Ingalls after he checked out the 100,000th item from the renovated facility since it reopened in October. COURTESY

By Ginnie Graham News Columnist | 0 comments

A few months ago, Tulsa resident Michael Mullens discovered an addictive romance novel while browsing at Central Library. It ended up winning him a surprise.

Last week, Mullens was given an Amazon Echo digital device for checking out the 100,000th item from the library. The book he checked out that day was one of the 11 titles by his favorite writer — romance author Brenda Hampton.

“I use the library practically every day. This was a shock,” he said. “I check out books once every two weeks. But I go to use the Internet and am in the process of making my resume for a better-paying job. The features the Central Library has can reach more people.”

The Central Library opened in October after a three-year, \$55 million renovation. It has a daily traffic count of more than 1,500 people.

While the institution offers an array of updated technologies including a sound studio and digital learning labs, the printed word still remains in high demand.

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Library staff wanted to celebrate the milestone of the 100,000th item checked out

and plan to do the same at the 1 million mark.

“Even as many readers transition to accessing library materials on tablets, smartphones and other digital devices, there is still a strong demand for a physical copy of a book,” Buddy Ingalls, Central Library manager, said in a statement.

“Our main objective is to connect people with information in a format they prefer. It won’t be that long before we are celebrating 1 million.”

Libraries are a great equalizer. Anyone from any social class or background can get the same access to knowledge, entertainment or resources for personal improvement.

Mullens uses the library for all those reasons.

“Reading opened a lot of doors for me,” he said. “Usually when I’m at the library, I’m on a mission. I’m checking out books, updating my resume or working online.”

Mullens was looking for a western book when he came across what he calls a typical trashy romance novel. Usually men shun the genre, but Mullens has embraced this author with gusto.

“I was reading the back of the book and thought this is something I could get into,” he said. “Growing up, I didn’t do a lot of reading. I’d fall asleep when I got into a book. But with this author here, I can’t put her books down.

“I’ll read from one to six chapters a day.”

Hampton is an African-American writer based in St. Louis who has written more than 32 books, novellas and anthologies including the popular “The Naughty Series.” She’s been listed as a top author in Essence and Upscale magazines and listed among the most influential black female authors.

Mullens plans to read all her works and encouraged his mother and daughter to pick up a copy.

“She’s the type of author you want to turn off the phone, grab a bag of chocolates and a throw on a good winter day,” Mullens said. “It’s about how she approaches her stories. It reminds me of everyday life.”

After Mullens described a storyline featuring a middle-age woman who was left by her husband for a young, hot thing, he decided to keep the ending secret.

“Well, I won’t tell you which book in case you get it,” he said.

Mullens is a native of West Virginia who moved to Tulsa in May of last year to work and now has a goal of attending the Spartan School of Aeronautics. Lately, he has been working in day labor jobs.

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Mullens said the Amazon Echo took some getting used to, saying he got the "heebie-jeebies" when the voice-activated speaker would power up across the room. But, he finds it useful to keep tabs on traffic, sports and other radio programs.

He can't speak highly enough of libraries.

"Use the library as much as you can," he said. "It doesn't cost anything. It's a place to go and get useful information. If you have a problem, go and let them help you. The library is so helpful."

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It was a very tough issue. The great challenge we faced through this whole thing is how this process had been carried out for years... I didn't hear from anyone tonight that they're passionate about Tulsa.
R.P. Ryan, Tulsa Mayor

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By Scott Tagg

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