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Ginnie Graham: New bookmobile travels well-worn path for Tulsa library patrons

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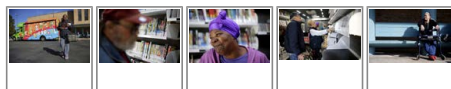
Posted: Monday, November 28, 2016 12:00 am

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Coletta Ware leaves the Tulsa City-County Library Bookmobile with books during a stop at the Inhofe Plaza apartments on Nov. 21. MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World

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Bookmobile

Tulsa City-County Library's bookmobile makes stops in late afternoon and early evening Monday-Thursday at 24 locations across Tulsa. For details and a schedule, go to tulsalibrary.org/services/bookmobile or call 918-549-7323.

By Ginnie Graham News Columnist | 1 comment

When the Tulsa City-County Library bookmobile rolled up and opened its doors for business, Mabel Padgett was waiting with a hug ready.

She knows the library staff who make the stop once a month at Inhofe Plaza, a low-income housing community for seniors and disabled people. She chit-chats a bit before exchanging her armful of books and movies for an updated batch. It'll last her until next month's visit.

Padgett looks at each spine, scoffing when I mention how people like electronic downloads into phones and tablets.

"Not everyone likes that," she said. "I'm old school. I like to read with books in my hands."

In recent years, the bookmobile huffed across the city on its last wheels, prone to breakdowns. It made keeping all the scheduled appointments tough.

Even when running, the 20-year-old vehicle wasn't equipped for handicapped people, was dark inside and had so-so heating and



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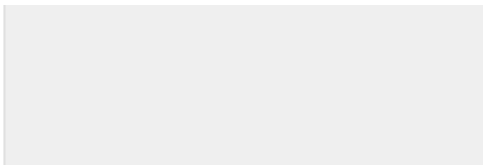
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air conditioning. It was common for items to fall off shelves while driving.

Six weeks ago, a new, custom-made vehicle was unveiled — made possible with a donation from Ruth Nelson, who was a longtime chairwoman of the Tulsa Housing Authority board. It took a year for library staff to design the bookmobile.

This version has a lift for disabled people and is two feet wider inside to fit wheelchairs and walkers. Everyone can see the full collection. Skylights allow in natural light, two self-checkout stands are available, and shelves are made to hold items in place en route.

It also has Wi-Fi, solar panels, adjustable workstations and outer speakers and hookups available to show programs on television screens. Not to forget the basics — it holds up to 3,000 library items.

“It has changed everything,” said Tracy Warren, manager of community outreach and literary services. “It changed our work life. It changed the lives of our customers. We know it’ll start up when we need. It’ll work on time. It’s phenomenal.

“This is one of a kind. It has surpassed all our expectations.”

Bookmobile history: In 1930, the Tulsa library became the first in the state to purchase a bookmobile. Driven and led by Helen G. Ware, it held nearly 600 books.

The wagon-style vehicle had sides that lifted up to show shelves stocked with books. Regular stops included Morningside Hospital (now Hillcrest Medical Center) and Florence Park, where children wet from the nearby wading pool would check out 300 to 400 books a week.

By 1937, the bookmobile was worn out, described by a reporter as a “one-hoss shay.” A new bookmobile was purchased to hold up to 1,000 titles and had “unbreakable” glass on the sides instead of steel paneling.

By 1950, it was lumbering across the city needing constant repairs just as service was extended to north Tulsa. In 1952, the library purchased four bookmobiles with bond funds.

A decade later, three bookmobiles were purchased for \$22,000 each to supplement those already in use. The rolling libraries stopped at 51 schools and communities. Reflecting the design of the time, a psychedelic-like bookmobile called the “Mod-Mobile” was acquired in the ‘70s.

In 1991, bond funds purchased an \$83,500 uniquely made bookmobile that ran for 17 years. It held up to 2,500 books and materials and stopped at public housing communities and isolated areas in the county.

Making connections: With all the gadgets and online options, it’s easy to forget the sizable population who go without. Also, there really is no replacement for browsing.

Up until nearly two years ago, Tawnua Montandon never went to the library. She didn’t have a way to get to a branch consistently and isn’t into computers.

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While serving as the resident activities coordinator at Inhofe Plaza, Montandon learned that the Tulsa City-County Library had a bookmobile. It was she who pushed to make her community a regular stop.

"We get bored around here, and it's nice to have something to do," Montandon said. "I like the people who do it. It's the same people each time. It's not like those places with a lot of turnover."

Without it, residents would be watching television or playing cards. With it, they are reading, watching movies and documentaries, and exploring music.

"There is a social component," Warren said. "Many of our customers may be isolated. They may get outside to see their doctor, but they are not interacting on a regular basis. This is a sense of community. We have the same staff and get to know them. They are making connections."

Materials stocked in the nearly \$500,000 bookmobile are catered for each stop, though items for a variety of age ranges are on the shelves.

Each month, the bookmobile makes about 50 stops. Visits in the day are at hubs where seniors and disabled people live, and evening stops are at family locations.

"There is a place for bookmobiles in the 21st century," Warren said. "Our goal is to persist and be consistent for our customers."

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Today's E-Edition

The image shows a preview of the Tulsa World newspaper front page. The main headline is "TU wins annual Mayor's Cup game, Sports; BI". Other headlines include "Ailing grandmother travels home to caring for three children, AMERICA; REBORN / 1A", "Eleven injured in Ohio State University attack, News, A5", "Officer returns to court today", "History gets set in stone", and "State to push ahead with A-F system update". The page also features a "ROUTE 66" section and a "GOVERNOR'S OFFICE" section.

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