

The passion of two librarians in the Galena R-II School District is proving to benefit more than 300 middle and high school students. Rosanna Bivens and Linda Blesi both have a love for books and sharing them with the students of Galena.

While one may think that in today's digital world students wouldn't like hard copies of books, that isn't the case in Galena. Bivens and Blesi work hard to make books go viral in the school.

In order to spread the word about new books, Blesi said, "All we have to do is sell a book to one student. If we've read it and we know what a student likes to read, we can recommend it and if they like it, it goes from there." Bivens agreed with the sentiment and said, "Some of it is just getting the right book in the right kid's hands and then the book will sell itself."

Their love for stories is evident. Bivens, who works at both the high school and elementary school, has a soft spot for the children's book "Go, Dog. Go!" but she also loves fantasy novels that take her to a different universe. Ironically, Blesi, a library aide who works primarily at the high school, has always loved all children's books but she also enjoys reading the new popular fiction books that the students are also reading.

"I've read a lot since I've been here," said Blesi, who has been working in the district for more than 18 years. "The only problem is the students want you to have read every book in the library and with about 9,000 books in here, if I read 365 a year, it's going to be a long time before I get them all read."

Spreading an interest in books doesn't stop with just the students. Bivens and Blesi find that an interesting book will make its way to siblings, teachers and even to parents. Bivens recalls one family where a mom always reads the books that her daughters bring home because she enjoys the books as much as her daughters do. There is another student who takes cookbooks home for her grandmother and another student who takes home books about horses because their father likes horses.

Blesi said, "If a book is overdue, I'll ask the student where their book is and sometimes they'll say, 'Well my mom is reading it and she's not through with it yet,' so I'll say, 'Ok, let mom finish it.'"

Due to the sheer number of books in both district libraries, Bivens is glad that the parents read as well. She relies on parents to give her feedback on the content of the books she can't read. Sometimes a parent will catch content of a book that may not be appropriate for a certain level and sometimes parents will respond positively to new books.

Beyond providing books for individual students to read for fun and for research, the librarians also help provide teachers with the classroom sets of books they need. Some of the book sets that the school owns are run down from decades of use and due to their poor condition they don't get used in the classroom like they should.

Additionally, as Common Core curriculum is further integrated into schools, it can be hard for smaller institutions to find the funding to keep up with the standards. Students are required to do

more research on non-fiction topics using a variety of media and in the high school library, that's an area that is lacking. Many of the non-fiction books in the library are from the 1970s and 1980s. While some topics don't change much over the years, there are new topics including the war in Afghanistan, cyber bullying and other current issues that require new books.

The problem with purchasing all of these required books is funding. Bivens said that the district is generous with their funding for the library but it is never enough to keep the library current. A majority of the library's funding comes from the district but it is supplemented through income from a yearly book fair and through grants like the Power Up Grant from White River Valley Electric Cooperative's Operation Round Up program.

This is the third time the Galena High School Library has received the \$500 grant. They purchased eight new non-fiction books and three classroom sets of books including "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" both by Mark Twain, and "The Graveyard Book" by Neil Gaiman.

Galena English Teacher Caleb Stokes said, "With the new Common Core state standards, there's a focus on the historical study of American literature. I'm not sure how someone can study American literature, in Missouri no less, and not read 'Huck Finn.'"

Bivens has also found that when a teacher has a book they are excited to teach, the students are going to be excited to read it too. The new classroom books certainly apply. Galena English Teacher David Norman said, "Something contemporary like 'The Graveyard Book' isn't necessarily something that teachers would request a lot. It's just good to have the funds available to be able to teach the literature you know, are very comfortable with and enjoyed, too."

"Some of our kids love just having a book to read. They want to hold a physical book in their hands," Blesi said and with the help of Operation Round Up's Power Up Grants, the Galena High School Library got the extra help they needed to fill in more spaces in their materials.

Blevins said, "We're just grateful. It makes us happy when the kids come in and they say, 'Oh, I didn't know you had this book,' or, 'This is really great.' I'm glad to also support our teachers and this helps us do that."