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Book Heroes: Little Free Library Announces 2023 Todd H. Bol Awards for Outstanding Achievement

From a literacy leader on Pine Ridge Reservation to a West Coast public library system, winners of the fifth-annual awards display a spirit of community and care



Todd H. Bol Award winner Mai Le of Daly City, California

Saint Paul, MN (May 17, 2023) – The Little Free Library (LFL) nonprofit organization is delighted to present the fifth-annual Todd H. Bol Awards for Outstanding Achievement to five extraordinary individuals and one exemplary organization who embody LFL's mission to build community, inspire readers and

expand book access for all. Today's announcement falls on LFL's eleventh anniversary of becoming a nonprofit organization. It is also part of the organization's inaugural [Little Free Library Week](#), a global celebration running May 14-20.

Since LFL's inception, thousands of people around the world have become Little Free Library volunteer stewards—the caretakers of Little Free Library book-sharing boxes.

"It is our fifth year of granting the Todd H. Bol Awards," said LFL Executive Director Greig Metzger. "The selection task gets harder each year and 2023 was no different with so many great nominees to choose from. The winners' stories represent the great work that is being done by our volunteers and partners around the world. It is an honor and pleasure to recognize their work."

The winners are:

Dynamite Book Club of Santa Ana, California, which was created by Taylor Park, Layla Hahn, Susan Zhang and Alexandra Law. Started as a youth service project to support those without access to public libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic, the students established Little Free Libraries across the City of Santa Ana, including at the Santa Ana Zoo and Bristol Swap Mall. "We enjoyed the physical work of building, sanding, and painting these boxes, and it felt amazing to present them to places that needed some extra joy."

Valerie Janis of the Pine Ridge Reservation (South Dakota), a member of the Bay Mills Anishinaabe community and outreach research technician at Oglala Lakota College Woksape Tipi Library. Janis works with LFL to distribute books on the reservation and promote literacy. "I started the Little Free Library because Pine Ridge Reservation does not have access to books. The Little Free Library has impacted the reservation and encouraged people to build their own home libraries. [W]e have given over 2,500 books to people."

John Manuel Newland of Athens, Georgia, a young man who builds Little Free Library book-sharing boxes for his community, including local schools. "For me, apart from the satisfaction of building a product that I can be proud of and knowing I am helping my community, it has been interesting to understand that if you want to do something, you might just have to make it happen.... I had plenty of help, but there were so many times I could have just said, 'Well, looks like it's not going to work out,' and left it at that."

Mai Le of Daly City, California, who started a gift economy group and the first chartered Little Free Library in her diverse city, where more than half of residents are immigrants. Given that her city is about 60 percent Asian and 20 percent Hispanic, Le takes being a [Read in Color](#) library seriously. "I always have books by BIPOC authors for kids and adults in the library. It is hard to know the impact of this in our community, but I believe everyone deserves to see themselves in a book. I have always known that books connect people, but being a [Little Free Library] steward has shown me more facets of that. Through being a steward, I am slowly shaping the community I want to live and raise children in."

Tiffany Lester of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, who through the Regina Kindness Rocks project started a Little Free Library so children within the surrounding vulnerable community would have access to books and other essentials they need to succeed, such as food, toys, and other supplies. "I am an adopted female who also happens to be mentally disabled, so my connection to my own identity and community have been strained from the start. Establishing Little Free Libraries as all-access resource hubs has given me the chance to connect with my neighbors on a level that allows for the development of

my personal relationships.... Being a Little Free Library steward helps me reaffirm my worth as a person and change-maker.”

San Diego County Library of San Diego, California. In March 2021, San Diego County’s Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to install Little Free Libraries across San Diego County to boost literacy in low-income areas and communities of color. With the pandemic further exacerbating the lack of access to education and reading, the little libraries provide an invaluable chance for children to retain their reading skills and continue to learn during periods of isolation. To date, 43 Little Free Libraries have been installed and more than 20,000 books distributed. “Serving as the LFL Program Manager for San Diego County Library from the inception of the initiative in 2021 to 2023 has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my 21 years with the county,” said Laura Zuckerman. “What I treasure the most are the partnerships and relationships that have grown from this one little initiative. I have witnessed and I know that one book, one person, one Little Free Library, and one community can make a whole lot of change...and that’s what Little Free Libraries do every time one gets planted.”

The Todd H. Bol Awards for Outstanding Achievement are named for LFL’s founder, Todd Bol, who created the first Little Free Library book-sharing box in 2009 in Hudson, Wisconsin, and passed away unexpectedly in 2018. This is the fifth year the awards have been presented, and LFL will continue to honor Bol’s memory for years to come.

Bol said: “I really believe in a Little Free Library on every block and a book in every hand. I believe people can fix their neighborhoods, fix their communities, develop systems of sharing, learn from each other, and see that they have a better place on this planet to live.”

Read more about this year’s winners and see their photos: LittleFreeLibrary.org/todd-bol-awards

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ABOUT LITTLE FREE LIBRARY

Little Free Library® (LFL) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that builds community, inspires readers and expands book access for all through a global network of volunteer-led Little Free Libraries. There are more than 160,000 registered Little Free Library book-sharing boxes worldwide in all 50 states, 120 countries and seven continents. Through them, over 300 million books have been shared since 2009. LFL received the 2020 World Literacy Award as well as honors from the Library of Congress, National Book Foundation and others. The organization grants Little Free Libraries full of books to underserved areas through its Impact Library and Indigenous Library Programs and champions diverse books through its Read in Color initiative. To learn more, visit LittleFreeLibrary.org.



Three Dynamite Book Club founders



Valerie Janis of the Pine Ridge Reservation



John Manuel Newland of Athens, Georgia



Tiffany Lester of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada



Laura Zuckerman of the San Diego County Library



San Diego County Library project volunteers and young readers