

Norfolk Insider

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“Traveling Librarian”



As a police officer, she at times had to deliver a summons or a traffic ticket. As the Outreach Coordinator for the Norfolk Public Library, Lenaya Callies now delivers books.

Callies was a Norfolk police officer for four years in the early 1990's. When she and her husband started a family, she opted to leave the patrol car for a job in the police records department and later she worked at the fire division. In 2009, Gladys Maxwell retired as library outreach coordinator and Callies was asked if she was interested in delivering books to shut-ins. She has been the coordinator ever since in addition to her job work as legal assistant in the city attorney's office.

Callies, who is referred to by some of her patrons as “the library lady”, delivers books to seventy elderly people in the Norfolk area- all who love to read but are unable to get to the library on their own. Forty-five of these people are “regulars” in that they read at least two books a week.

“I'll go visit them and see what kind of books they like and what their interests are. Some might read six books in a week or four books in a month. I give them a call and ask if they're ready for me to bring them some new books,” Callies said.

Most of the retirees like pioneer stories, some like science fiction and a few like mysteries. They all are shut ins. Nearly all of them live in nursing homes with only ten living in their own homes.

“Stories about Amish people are huge,” Callies said as she pointed to a stack on her desk ready to be delivered, “These people are not big on books about guts and gore.”

The library has rows and rows of large print books that Callies peruses for selections to be placed in a cloth book bag that will be delivered to each reader.

She'll read the back of the book, talk to the patron about what they've read and liked and try to go by that in selecting their future books.

Some request books on the New York Bestsellers' list. Callies will use inter-library loan to find books that the readers may want but aren't available in Norfolk. The book "The Help" by Kathryn Stockett is a popular request right now with several people on the waiting list for the large print version.

One of Callies' desk drawers at the library holds each of her readers' library cards. After checking out a person's books with their card, she'll file the library check-out receipt for each reader so she can look through the file next time and make sure no one gets a book they've already read.

Besides delivering books, Callies also delivers puzzles from the library and even Internet research results. To an Alzheimer's patient who loves horses, she'll take picture books of horses that he pores over. She has had others who no longer have an interest in reading but will look at and discuss the contents of recipe books with the colorful pictures of prepared dishes.

Then there are the lifelong readers. Ninety-two-year-old Dorothy Ledyard lives at The Meadows and will read four books in the three week intervals between Callies' visits. "That's what I do. I like to read although I don't read as fast as I used to," Ledyard said.

Another Meadows resident, Nadine Truex, age 93, has failing eyesight so she listens to around ten audio books from the Norfolk library- all within a two week span. She prefers biographies having listened to Laura Bush's biography "Spoken from the Heart" and next on her reading list- Dick Cheney's "My Time". "I like to exercise my mind so I will listen to all kinds of books," said Truex who will sometimes stay up past midnight listening to a particularly interesting book, "It's just wonderful to have the library do this."

Callies said she enjoys visiting with the people she takes books to and may sometimes be asked to get an item from a high shelf or fix a bracelet.

"I might be the only person to visit with them so they're grateful when I can bring them a book and spend five minutes visiting. I like the people and love to be able to bring some enjoyment into their life," said Callies.