

Alumni project encourages community reading

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The Pages Opening People Project, a literacy advocacy nonprofit organization, challenges all electronic book receivers to give back what they get, according to POP secretary and UNC Asheville graduate Sarah Giavedoni.

"It's the paper-to-bytes program," Giavedoni said. "We thought it would be far more creative and kind of remind people that as they update their libraries to think of others. With the growing popularity of e-books and all things digital, we are challenging people who get Kindles or other e-book devices to donate one real paper book to a charity this season for every e-book they receive."

Project director and fellow UNCA graduate Jim MacKenzie said his research in e-book sales statistics led to the idea for the unconventional book promotion.

"I saw a lot of research and believable figures that the e-book and the Kindle are going to be some of the hottest selling items this Christmas season. I saw one estimate that they're probably going to sell well over \$1 billion worth during the Christmas season. That's a lot of money. We've crunched the numbers and figured that's a lot of books," MacKenzie said.

The POP Project began in 2009 and continues due to the help of UNCA graduates, including Giavedoni, MacKenzie and treasurer Alex Fisher.

MacKenzie said he originally got the idea for the organization from an issue in his personal life.

"I have a pen pal on death row in North Carolina, Melvin Hardy," MacKenzie said. "He told me how much he loves to read and how much of a lack of books there were for him. I found that many people make it a very low priority to make sure that a lot of the inmates, especially those on death row, get books. I figured starting a nonprofit would be one of the best ways to facilitate getting books."

POP delivered books to death row prisons in a few states and also distributed books locally.

This October, they conducted a Spanish language book drive with UNCA's Hispanic student group HOLA.

"We took them one of our drop boxes and sent them some informational material about the drive itself and about



Photo courtesy of Jim MacKenzie

Jim MacKenzie, left center, and Sarah Giavedoni, right center, stand with other members of the Pages Opening People Project. The project aims to encourage people holiday shopping for e-books, like Kindles, to donate paper books to those who aren't able to buy their own books.

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- Sarah Giavedoni,

Pages Opening People Project member

the need for Spanish language books. They helped us by trying to gather as many books as they could," Giavedoni said.

According to Mackenzie, not only does the group want to make books available, they also want to promote reading as a hobby and an activity.

"We feel it's also our job to advocate for books," Mackenzie said. "For

years, study after study shows that children, adults, and senior citizens are all reading less and less. We want to let people know that it is OK to read. You shouldn't be ashamed of reading. You should be proud of literacy."

MacKenzie said POP will devote much of their holiday time to the bytes-for-books challenge, which began on black Friday.

"We have a Facebook page which is easy to get to, and I'm going to be trying to raise as much awareness of it through interviews and appearances," MacKenzie said.

MacKenzie said in spreading the gift of literature, it is also important to practice and promote the act of reading.

"Keep reading," MacKenzie said. "You are not alone. Be proud of literacy. Make sure that when you're out reading, you hold your book high. Don't sit in the corner and cover it up. Be proud, show people that reading and literacy is nothing to be ashamed of."

According to Giavedoni, amid all the shoppers donating and giving gifts this season, it is important to remember books.

"There's a constant need for books in prisons, children's programs, women's shelters, homeless shelters, even through churches. This is the season for donating, and books are definitely an item that shouldn't be overlooked," Giavedoni said.