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SPINNING A TALE
La Grange author's love of art
inspires children's book

La Grange author
Christine Banks

Photo provided

By MELISSA RUBALCABA RISKE
For Shaw Media

It started with an itty, bitsy spider hanging out in the corner of the art gallery. From there, La Grange resident Christine Banks has spun a web that includes original art, contests and prizes for children and a children's book, too.

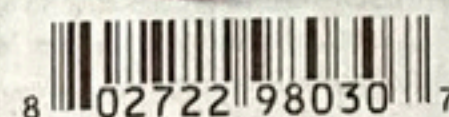
"I didn't set out to write a children's book. It started with a real spider," Banks said. "One day, I noticed a real spider by a painting of a scene under the sea and I wondered what the art must look like being that tiny."

Banks was working at the Naperville Art League Gallery when she first noticed that tiny spider in the corner. She previously had worked at the La Grange Art League Gallery. A graduate of Lyons Township High School, Banks is a self-taught artist, gleaning skills through work experiences, including a photography studio, and from her mother, who also crafted art.

Banks said she enjoyed her work with local artists. But in March 2020, the gallery closed its doors because of the pandemic and she found herself at home with time to spare. One of her daily rituals was a video call to her niece and nephew to read a story, including many in the Little Golden Books series.

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D-204 strategic planning process to begin

SUBURBAN LIFE MEDIA

LA GRANGE - Lyons Township High School District 204 will launch a strategic planning process that will include plans for community engagement to gather input from parents, staff, community members, alumni and students.

"The involvement of stakeholders from every part of our school community will result in a long-term framework for decision-making that builds upon our shared priorities," Superintendent Brian Waterman said in a news release. "We are excited to launch this inclusive strategic planning process and engage stakeholders from all 11 communities we serve, which will help strengthen our partnership. The strategic planning process will be collaborative, and it will allow us to honor our traditions, innovate together and inspire the future of LT."

A diverse group comprised of about 80 students, staff, parents, community members and district leaders will serve on the strategic planning team, the release stated. They will meet five times between January and May to discuss survey results, analyze district data and develop a proposed plan that will be shared with the school community. Information on opportunities to participate will be made available.

The most valuable piece of the process will be feedback. Throughout the strategic planning journey, Lyons Township will seek input from the school community. The first opportunity to provide feedback will be in the form of a survey, which will open later this month. The survey link will be published on the district's website and its social media channels in an effort to gather as much feedback as possible. Results from the survey will be

provided at a data retreat and will guide the strategic planning team throughout the process.

All of the data collected through interviews, focus groups and surveys, along with the district's mission statement, vision statement and guiding principles, will be analyzed to determine findings, as well as long-term goals and objectives for the district.

"The strategic plan will serve as a shared vision for all district stakeholders, and provide the blueprint for our work in the coming years," the release stated.

Consortium for Educational Change has been selected to assist in the facilitation of the strategic planning process. CEC provides schools and districts with a systemic, collaborative approach by identifying their unique challenges, and assists in building a district's capacity for continual improvement.

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For 100 days in a row, she would call and read to them a new book, and somewhere along reading the tales, she began to think back to that little spider in the art gallery. Day after day of reading to the children had helped her learn the cadence and style of a child's book and she thought perhaps she, too, could write a story inspired by the little spider in the gallery.

She didn't just put pen to paper to jot down her ideas. She created an entire storyboard for a visual roadmap. And for the art, she decided she would create original pieces of art that would be incorporated into the story through photography.

She wrote, illustrated, painted and photographed as she put the story together over the course of several months.

"It took multiple media to get the final result," Banks said.

"I love all the little details," she said, adding that as one reads the book they'll find familiar images such as a visual of the La Grange Public Library and other objects that harken back to her childhood when she adored reading Highlights magazine and searching for hidden objects.

"I was inspired by my own childhood," she said.

There were many days her husband and cat had to navigate around the home's coffee table, which was strewn with materials and pieces of the story as she crafted the tale about a little spider that she named Beanie.

She published her first book, "Adventures of Beanie the Spider," on Jan. 28, 2021, a date she chose to honor her mother. Banks has gifted several copies to local libraries, a tribute to the role libraries have played in her life, whether it was the place she roamed after school as a child or the La Grange Public Library, where she has taught classes and had interactive art exhibits in the building's lower level including "In My Backyard Art + Nature Exhibit" in 2018 and "Splash: World of Water" in 2019.

Crafting the book is only part of the tale. Banks had a vision for her story and how it could become a tool to inspire children to play with art. Since the book was published, she has enjoyed author events where she goes beyond reading the books. At the events, she hosts raffles to give away art supplies and talks to the children about their ideas. She's partnered with local businesses to host coloring contests featuring an illustration she's made with Beanie the Spider and

the prizes include art supplies.

"I want to promote the arts. I want you to make your own art," Banks said. "This isn't about selling books. I really have more fun talking about the arts. It's really fun to be out there and engage with children. They inspire me right back and they help me to develop Beanie as a character."

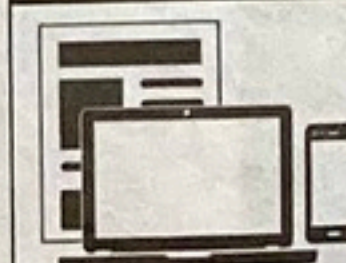
She has plans for more books to celebrate the little spider and art and said her second book is nearly ready. She plans to publish that book this year.

Banks crafted her own website featuring interactive activities for children, including coloring pages. She's a fan of collaborating with others and tries to pair her events with local businesses and restaurants, many of whom she's gotten to know through her work with the village where she also serves as a volunteer with the Design Review Commission.

She hopes to bring the stories to the community this spring and has a valentines-related coloring contest with Zoo Treats in Brookfield in which children can create their own artwork.

"I hope this sparks an interest and kids want to see an art gallery," Banks said. "I hope this inspires them to find their local art league. You don't realize how easy it is to see art in your own town."

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