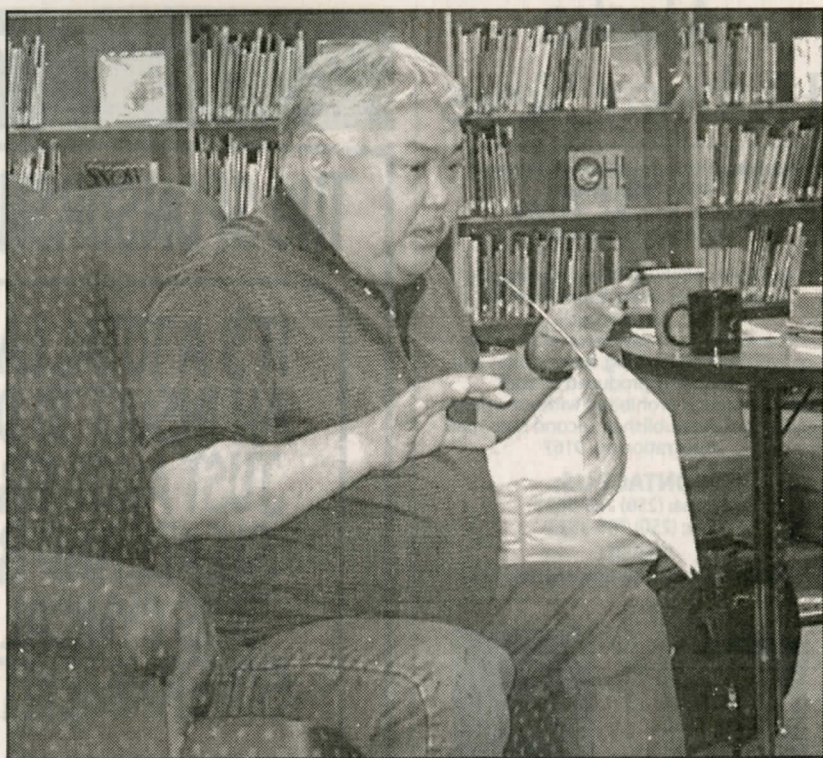


WS



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Michael Kusogak is a professional storyteller who shares his knowledge of the Arctic and the Inuit way of life with children across Canada.

Author visits are great for kids, says children's programmer

•CONT. FROM A1

Peltier explained that the library is happy whenever authors come to visit because they're always so interested in what the kids have to say.

"The authors make the storytelling really interactive because they have so much background in the story," explained Peletier.

Michael's work has won the Ruth Schwartz Award for children's literature and has been short listed for various other awards, the most

recent being the Hackmatack Award.

Some of his books have been translated into French, Japanese, Korean, and Braille. "A Promise is a Promise" appeared in a Hollywood movie, "Leaving Normal," and was made into a play. The play has been performed across Canada and the United States, in schools and in theatres, like the Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg and the Young People's Theatre in Toronto.

Acclaimed children's author visiting Fort St. John

RYAN LUX
Staff Writer

Renowned storyteller and author Michael Kusugak is coming to Fort St. John to read some of his books and share his stories of his traditional Inuit childhood in what is now Nunavut.

The Fort St. John Public Library Children's Programmer, Morgan Peltier, said it's very exciting that such a high-calibre storyteller like Kusugak is coming to Fort St. John.

"We do occasionally get authors come up, but having someone so celebrated and accomplished coming up here is a rare and exciting opportunity," she said.

In fact, Fort St. John is scheduled to be the first stop on Kusugak's storytelling tour of northern B.C. and Alberta.

"We're hoping to send him off with some fanfare," said Peltier who's hoping for a large turnout to the event scheduled for April 30.

One of Kusugak's most famous books is called "A Promise is a Promise," which he co-authored with famed children's author Robert Munsch.

"A Promise is a Promise," like all of Kusugak's stories brings the stories of his Arctic childhood to life.

Kusugak grew up in Repulse Bay, at the time part of the Northwest Territories where he used to hunt by

dogsled and camp overnight in igloos and rawhide tents.

His stories are filled with those memories and the narratives passed down to him by his family about Inuit culture and history.

Peltier said she's looking forward to local kids being able to meet a real-life writer.

"Aside from the benefits of having stories read to them, the kids will actually be listening to the stories' author. He can talk them through the process of story writing, which would be a great opportunity for any young aspiring writers out there," said Peltier.

"It's one career that kids have a hard time connecting with, usually."

•SEE AUTHOR ON A3



RYAN LUX PHOTO

Fort St. John Public Library Children's Programmer Morgan Peltier hopes droves of Fort St. John children turn out for acclaimed author Michael Kusugak's readings at the Library on Apr. 30.

APRIL 25, 2011

For Love of The Written Word

RYAN LUX
STAFF WRITER

Every month an eclectic bunch of writers and poets gather at the Rabbit Hole bookstore to read what they've been working on – whether the words are hurriedly scribbled on scraps of paper or methodically laid out in journals or print.

The atmosphere was contemplative and tinged with the anxiety that comes with opening your private work to the judgment of strangers. In a small circle at the back of the store sat an author with two published books under her belt, next to a young writer who read her poetry publicly for the first time ever.

Rounding out the ensemble were a couple of newcomers to the group and some wily

veterans who have been attending the readings since they started more than two years ago.

Between poems and prose, the writers discussed technique, talking about how they come up with ideas and the way in which they're translated from their minds to the page.

"Do you prefer computers or pen and paper?" "Do you wait until you're inspired or do you consciously work on a piece?" "How much do you edit something?"

These are some of the questions that come up when you pack a room full of writers. Henry See organizes the monthly event and explained that sometimes the questions get slightly more vigorous.

"It really depends on the month. Sometimes there's some really good exchange and con-

structive criticism and other months there are a lot of new people so the comfort level isn't there to get to the point where you get something you can sink your teeth into," said See.

He said each month delivers a different group and pointed out that over the two years he's been hosting the open mic nights many writers have come and gone. In fact, most of the writers featured in his first anthology, titled *DiversCities*, no longer live in town.

Even if most writers are just passing through, See explained that providing a forum for them to discuss their passion is important.

"In Fort St. John it's important that writers understand there are other people writing, so they feel less isolated," See said, "The other part is making sure we have a local voice because so much of the art we consume is produced elsewhere."

See credits the readings for giving writers the chance to boost their confidence and the opportunity to learn from others.

"They can come out and see there is a group of people who are supportive and understand what it is to write and be able to share that with someone," he said.

The next reading will be held the second Tuesday evening of next month.

Literacy Society looking for volunteer tutors

By Michaela Garstin

FORT ST. JOHN- The Fort St. John Literacy Society is looking for volunteer tutors to help people catch up on their reading, writing and math skills.

An all-day tutor training session is being held on April 30, followed by evening sessions the next four Wednesdays.

Tutors will be helping people improve their literacy skills to find better jobs or to further their education.

"Anyone who feels comfortable sharing their knowledge of language or math with the learner should come by," said program facilitator Gail Lundquist.

Tutors usually meet with their clients once a week at the library or in their home.

"Everyone has had contact with people from other countries, but until you are working one-on-one with a new comer you miss so much of the rich culture heritage that they bring to our shores," said tutor Frankie Fogaard. "I have learned so much about China and Syria since I became a tutor two years ago."

For more information or to register for the training sessions call The Fort St. John Literacy Society at 250-785-2110.

Head librarian starting new chapter in life

RYAN LUX
Staff Writer

Fort St. John is losing one of its most prolific bookworms. After 17 years working in the Fort St. John Public Library, head librarian Kimberly Partanen said she's ready for the next chapter of her life.

Partanen and her husband have lived in Fort St. John since 1994, when she started working at the library as a casual employee. The couple raised their daughter here, but she's been away for three years at university in Ontario.

"We've been empty nesters for years now and we don't have any family here, so we just decided that we were still the right age to move on to the next phase of our lives," said Partanen about her move.

Her husband will be starting school in Kelowna in the fall for waste water treatment and Partanen said she will try to eke out a spot for herself in the library world down south.

Over the course of her 17 years at

the library, Partanen has seen a lot of changes.

"When I first started here we were still on the card catalogue system," she recalled.

The biggest changes have been technological.

"We only had a few computers in the library that some of us used for word processing, but not for our daily work," said Partanen.

Now Partanen said the office is completely automated, which makes keeping track of the vast book collection much easier.

Despite the efficiency computers have brought to the library, Partanen said she's glad that she got into the trade at the sunset of the analogue days.

"Working with the card system really taught me the guts of it and let me understand the processes of cross-referencing authors and subjects," said Partanen.

Along with the catalogue shift, Partanen said technology has changed the way people use the library.

She said that when she started, there were no public access computers and, accordingly, research was done in a completely different way.

"When you came to the library to work on a school project, you had to look everything up in books and photocopy reference materials," said Partanen, "You didn't have the internet where you could type something in and a Wikipedia article would pop up. You'd have to drag out these big almanacs to find your information."

Now Partanen said she could probably get rid of the entire reference system and all but a few oldtimers wouldn't notice.

For the most part, she said, people come to the library now to use the computers or for reading material.

As the years have taken their toll on the operations of the library, Partanen said they've had a big impact on her personally.

"I feel like I've grown up with the library because I was 24-years-old when I started here, this was my first professional job," she said.

•SEE LIBRARIAN ON A3



RYAN LUX PHOTO

After 17 years at the Fort St. John Public Library, head librarian Kimberly Partanen said the south is calling.

Librarian will miss seeing kids' enthusiasm over books

•CONT. FROM A1

Now that she's worked her way from casual part-timer all the way to head librarian, Partanen said she has the feeling that she's achieved as much as she can here and is ready for a new challenge.

However, she didn't make the decision lightly.

"It's very hard because basically the two of us are walking away from two

good jobs. [We] made our lives and careers here," said Partanen.

"But one of the hardest things will be leaving my coworkers, there's four or five of us that have been here for ten years or more and it's going to be hard to leave such a great group of people."

Leaving the Fort St. John Public Library staff will be tough, but potentially leaving her trade also weighs on her.

She said one of the things she'll miss

most is seeing the little children climbing up the stool at the sign out desk with their heads just popping above the counter with a stack of books.

Despite that, Partanen said she's excited about her decision.

"We came here to work and we stayed to raise our daughter and now we feel like we have time to explore," said Partanen, "Life is too short to stay in one spot forever."



JAMIE WOODFORD PHOTO

Librarian Jenny Snyder sorts through one of many boxes of donated books for the annual Friends of the Library Book Fair happening Apr. 7 to 9.

Donated books help keep library functioning

JAMIE WOODFORD
Staff Writer

The annual Friends of the Library Book Fair is fast approaching.

Those wishing to donate used books have until Tuesday, Apr. 5 to drop them off at the library.

"People cleaning out, spring cleaning can get all their books together and donate them to the library, and people looking for new books... for the summer, then they can get some really good deals," exclaimed Librarian Jenny Snyder.

The sale starts at 9:30 a.m. on Apr. 7 and continues during library hours through to Apr. 9.

Previous years have seen thousands of books collected for the sale, and although there aren't quite as many this year, Snyder said there's a great selection already piled up.

"There's everything," she said of the genres available. "There's lots of books on art that are in new condition, lots of cookery books, some gardening books, and lots of fiction. John Grisham, I would say, is by far the most popular author donated this year," she laughed.

There are also quite a variety of children's books for all ages, and lots of self-help type books.

"The most copies of any one title... is quite a recent book, it's called *The Secret Daughter*. It was on the best sellers list. We've had many copies of that," she added.

The money raised at the book fair will go towards items for the library that are not general-

ly covered by its budget, and some money may be put towards programming if the library is short on funds.

In past years, the Friends of the Library has purchased window blinds, bookshelves, a dishwasher and dinnerware for library events, and a refrigerator to keep food used for events fresh rather than running out at the last minute to buy it.

Snyder said items like these help the library to be more environmentally friendly.

"[The dishwasher] has a sanitizing feature to it so that when we have events and programs we can use real plates instead of buying the plastic or paper, so [we're] keeping with the city's policy of being green wherever possible," she said.

Snyder said she wasn't sure what this year's fundraiser would buy, but she mentioned the Friends of the Library have already bought a turning bookrack for the teen section this year.

"The teen section is a growing section for our library. We're very proud that the teens in town are reading quite a lot these days, so we're looking to improve their selection as always."

Library staff will be setting up for the sale on Wednesday, and they are already getting excited, said Snyder.

"The staff always look forward to this event because it brings new people into the library, and just having the people in here and getting excited because they're getting a deal," she said. "People leave with boxes and boxes of books. It's always an exciting time for us."

Literacy no longer 'nice to have'

•CONT. FROM A1

Throughout her time at the North Peace Literacy Alliance, Evans said she's witnessed the community obtain a better understanding of what literacy is about.

"Even if they aren't using the word 'literacy', people are getting it," said Evans, "People are discussing literacy skills, especially employers who are recognizing it's hard to find employees with these skills."

Communication, Evans noted, seems to be the biggest downfall for most employers, so using play to promote literacy is perfect for this area.

District of Taylor Mayor Fred Jarvis said his municipality has been working hard to promote literacy.

The pre-school housed in the village's elementary school, said Jarvis, is a good example of what the community has accomplished.

"We did have a preschool in town but it had its ups and downs and eventually had no place to be located," explained Jarvis.

But because the community recognized the importance of having a local pre-school, Jarvis said, they worked with the school district to find a place in the local school.

"Having the preschool inside of the elementary school has given us the opportunity to relate the younger kids with the older students," said Jarvis.

"It's imperative that young kids start learning how to learn at a young age," he said.

Based on his own experience in school, Jarvis explained how important it is to use fun activities like play to promote learning.

"Mostly, in those days, not every one got to go to school and a great many didn't make it past grade five," said Jarvis, "It just seemed that there were a lot more interesting things to do outside."

But now more than ever, with a rapidly changing world, Jarvis acknowledged that high literacy skills are crucial.

"It's such a crowded world out there, so you need to get along with people and you need to understand the world around you."

As Jarvis pointed out, literacy is no longer a skill that is simply nice to have. Research indicates that higher literacy levels pay off for individuals and communities.

Focusing on play better socializes children and can be directly attributed to young children's development, even more so than heredity.

On a societal level, investing in literacy makes good business sense. Because for every dollar invested in early literacy intervention there is a whopping return of \$7.16 over the course of a child's lifetime.

In addition, the National Centre for Family Literacy shows that families who participated in early literacy intervention programs reduced the participants' chances from full dependence on social assistance from 76, to 11 per cent.

Literacy day focused on play

RYAN LUX
Staff Writer

Across Canada and in Fort St. John literacy proponents are hosting a myriad of events to promote reading and writing comprehension.

The theme of this year's Literacy Day is "Play for Literacy," so events are focusing on how people can expand and enhance their literacy through fun activities such as rolling play-dough, building puzzles or playing board games.

"Even playing outside promotes literacy," said North Peace Literacy Alliance Executive Coordinator Erin Evans. "There's problem solving, critical thinking, working with other kids - you always see kids fighting with each other - learning to resolve those fights helps promote self-regulation."

Some of the highlights of Family Literacy Day will be the Scrabble Tournament at the library and a series of events

hosted by Dan Davies at Patch Java.

From noon until two there will be playing and eating, from 4 pm. To 6 pm there will be Pictionary, and capping the day off will be a dramatic Munch reading by Davies.

Children's author Robert Munch is an avid supporter of Family Literacy Day. He runs a contest each year where children can send in their own stories. When Munch picks the best one he goes to the child's home, spends the day with them reading and playing, then performs his stories for the winner's community.

"Our performance hopes to highlight his efforts, and besides he writes great stories," said Evans.

In addition to the library and Patch Java, local elementary schools will be marking Family Literacy Day with a whole range of literary-style activities.

Play is a key way to promote literacy, said Evans, because it encapsulates so many critical

skills like communication, numeracy, teamwork, reading and writing. The bonus, Evans explained, is that everyone likes to play regardless of age. Whether it's with blocks, monopoly or cards, play is appealing.

At a presentation at Taylor Elementary School Wednesday, Evans showed parents how playing with their children increases their literacy skills.

"Even if it's with really young children, things like rolling play-dough or pinching eyedroppers increase fine motor skills and will help their writing skills," explained Evans.

Competitive games are also important activities because they teach children to lose and be okay with it.

She also suggested acting out story books because it encourages children to understand what the story is about and then communicate that with other people using their actions and words.

•SEE LITERACY ON A3



RYAN LUX PHOTO

Erin Evans and Mayor Fred Jarvis spoke with mothers about how important and easy it is to introduce literacy into play. (left to right) Lynden, Marla and Norma Dumoulin, Karlene and Logan Thompsons, Fred Jarvis and Erin Evans.