

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

A little library in Columbia, just around the corner from another

By [Mollie Barnes](#)

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The sign reads, "Take a book return a book" in Laurie Spate-Smith's little library at 807 Crestland Ave. ; [Mollie Barnes](#)

COLUMBIA — It happened in twos. Two free "little libraries" just two houses from each other opened within two days.

Laurie Spate-Smith had no idea The Rollins-Crest Little Free Library opened Wednesday on the corner of West Rollins Road less than a block away from her own little library she opened Monday in front of her house on 807 Crestland Ave.

These book exchanges are part of a movement to promote literacy and build community.

Free libraries are book exchanges based on the trust system. Anyone can walk up and take a book. Owners request you return the book when finished, or leave a different one in its place. Free libraries function as "literature on the trust system," according to a Rollins-Crest Little Free Library flier.

An uncanny coincidence

Barbara Overby, who started The Rollins-Crest Little Free Library, said she found it very funny that another free library opened up just down the street without any coordination.

Overby heard about the movement through her daughter in Colorado.

"I just wanted to do it instantly," she said.

Her neighbor Jan Colbert gave her a spot in the corner of her yard to put the little library since her house doesn't see a lot of traffic because of its positioning on West Rollins Road, a dead-end street.

Spate-Smith's library box sits just at the end of her driveway, where it can easily be mistaken for a mailbox if you aren't careful.

Passion becomes a business

Spate-Smith was an English teacher at Jefferson Junior High School until she retired this year.

"I wanted to do anything to do with books in retirement that I can," she said.

She saw the idea for free little libraries in a magazine and decided she wanted to start one. She and her friend, Lori Kilfoil, also a former teacher, intend to make it into an entrepreneurial enterprise. They call themselves the Sisters of the River, stemming from a nickname they created after 25 years of going on float trips with friends, she said.

"I set up a shop to build them (the library boxes)," she said. "We already have requests."

She plans to sell some boxes decorated and undecorated. Undecorated waterproof boxes will cost about \$150.

However, the first few she is making are donations, she said. The first one in her yard is a prototype. The second one they are working on is for a bed and breakfast in Hartsburg that Kilfoil's mother-in-law owns, which they hope will cater to bikers on the Katy Trail. She said she wants to donate one in memorial of Tre'Veon Marshall, 17, one of her former students who was [fatally shot Sunday night in McKee Park](#).

She hopes another can go to Ragtag Cinema, but hasn't spoken with the theater about the project yet. Spate-Smith said she has an extensive collection of film books that she wants to donate.

They have received many book donations, as well, so they plan to sell the boxes fully stocked, she said.

Private collections made public

Some books come from private donations from friends. Most of the books starting out in the little cabinet at West Rollins Road and Crestland Avenue come from the Overby's extensive book collection. Books line the walls in rooms at the Overby house.

"The idea is to get the books out," Overby said.

She said they had already donated a lot of books to the public library.

But some books are treasures to Overby and her husband. Osmund "Ozzie" Overby, a professor emeritus of art history and archaeology, has an extensive library of art books, but those won't be out in the book exchange, Barbara Overby said.

Choosing which books to donate hasn't been easy for the Overbys.

Barbara Overby picked up "Black Horseman" by Tom Bass, a book her husband liked and that she planned to put in the library and said to her husband, "We don't need it anymore."

"Who knows, I might," he responded.

She said there are some books she might not see again, but if she ever wants to read them after she donates them she can afford to go out and buy them again.

Barbara Overby said part of her motivation for opening the library was the amount of time today's children spend reading online.

"It's important that kids see that books have a binding," she said.

Spate-Smith also said with increased readership of books on e-readers and tablets, she also hopes her little library will help people get real books in their hands.

Supervising editor is [Katie Moritz](#).