**Bookworms: Students supply books to their peers**

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Photo courtesy Joe Rizzo Savannah Rizzo and Sarah Nash carry piles of books into Hope School.

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Three Nikiski High School students have figured out a way to spread their love of reading to those with less access to literature.

Spearheaded by senior Savannah Rizzo, the trio formed T-books nearly three years ago, to fundraise money and purchase reading materials for middle school students, which they then personally drop of at school sites around the central Kenai Peninsula.

“I figured that I could actually help someone with their situation, that is something to do on a mass scale,” Rizzo said. “Books are a form of comfort therapy and its really good for kids to have something like that or something that they care about. I love reading and I want to give others the opportunity to read if they can’t get the opportunity to themselves.”

At the start of this school year, T-Books expanded operations all the way out to Hope School at the edge of the Kenai Peninsula. Previously they had supplied students in Nikiski, Kenai and Soldotna with the big hauls.

The group, which also includes sophomores Maisey Potten and Sarah Nash, first visits a school and finds out what titles their younger peers are looking for. They can’t always buy everything the student’s want, but will try their best to find similar stories. They purchase in bulk from online warehouses, where entire pallets can cost only $600.

Rizzo said they target middle schoolers, because she sees it as a pivotal age that might determine whether or not someone becomes a life-long reader. There are barriers to entry.

There is a difference between owning a book and borrowing one, Rizzo insists. It gives students the chance to have something special of their own, begin a personal collection and find out what they love, she said.

Moreover, teenagers often don’t have reliable transportation to get them to and from the library when they need to pick up and drop off what they have checked out Rizzo said.

Nash said one of the most significant moments in the past two years was when she was handing a book to a little boy who took it from here and immediately smelled the pages of his new novel.

“It is a great feeling,” Nash said. “We can see how happy they are to get the books…The smell of the book is just wonderful.”

The girls have raised nearly $3,000 dollars so far and hope to continue on the tradition. Nash said she would like to continue to move the program into other schools that are willing and wanting, and it possible, to see it carried on once she and her two friends graduate high school.

Rizzo’s father, Joe Rizzo has been their main source of transportation between sites and huge supporter of the endeavor.

“I think that for her, Savannah has kind of always felt for the underdog,” Joe Rizzo said. “And the idea that we tried to teach our kids is that ‘You are pretty blessed, you have what you need’… I think she has taken that as meaning other people don’t have everything they need and if this is some small thing that she can do she wanted to do it.”

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