

Donor buys books for children of hotel employees

■Frequent guest at Geiser Grand Hotel can't visit this year because of pandemic

By Jayson Jacoby
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — Reanna Clark seems more interested in tasting her brand new book than reading it.

Which is pretty typical behavior for a 6-month-old.

But Reanna's older brother, Colton, 12, is eager to start turning the pages of his volumes, which include Gary Paulsen's "Tucket's Travels," a series chronicling the adventures of a 14-year-old boy who is kidnapped while traveling on the Oregon Trail in 1847.

"I like to read whatever looks good," Colton said.

His brother Gage, 7, is examining a stack of books, including one of Tedd Arnold's "Fly Guy" stories.

The Clarks are inspecting their new books in the lobby of the Geiser Grand Hotel on Baker

City's Main Street.

This is not a coincidence. Their mother, Mandy Clark, is the front desk manager at the restored 131-year-old hotel that is a Baker City landmark.

The Clarks' books — and about two dozen more — were donated to the children and grandchildren of Geiser Grand employees by a longtime guest who wasn't able to make her annual visit this year due to the coronavirus.

Geiser Grand owner Barbara Sidway said the donor, who asked that she remain anonymous, called recently to say that she wouldn't be traveling to Baker City.

But the guest had a request.

She asked Sidway to compile a list of Geiser Grand employees' children and grandchildren, including their ages and interests.

Then the donor called Carolyn Kulog, owner of Betty's Books in Baker City, and ordered books for each child.

Most received two or three. "She's so thoughtful," Sidway said of the donor.

Sidway said the woman

always browses Betty's Books during her stays in Baker City.

The books arrived last week and the Clarks picked up their books on Friday.

The eldest, 16-year-old Lane, wasn't there, but he also received books.

Mandy, who lives in Keating Valley, said her kids have "been getting tired of reading the same books."

The children are accustomed to deliveries from the Baker County Bookmobile, which hasn't been operating this spring due to the pandemic.

Clark said she was surprised, and gratified, by the donor's generosity.

"It is so cool," she said.

Clark said she has met the woman during some of her previous visits.

Sidway said she has talked with the woman since the books arrived, and the benefactor wants to order more books for Geiser Grand employees' children and grandchildren.

"It makes my heart swell and puts a smile on my face in a time when little else can," Sidway wrote in an email.



Photo by Jayson Jacoby/EO Media Group

Reanna Clark, 6 months old, has a firm grasp on her new book, "Pat the Bunny," as she sits on the lap of her older brother, Colton, 12.

Layoffs, few seasonal workers at Oregon state parks

Associated Press

PORTLAND — Oregon's state parks have started to reopen, but the agency that manages them is facing an estimated \$22 million budget shortfall between now and next June amid the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department said Tuesday it will lay off 47 full-time employees by June 30. That's in addition to the 338 seasonal staff that will not be rehired this year, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. Only 77 of 415 seasonal positions have been filled for 2020.

The parks department does not receive funding from tax dollars but from the Oregon Lottery, camping and parking fees, and RV registration fees.

Oregon state parks closed to the public in late March, just before Gov. Kate Brown announced a stay-home order that closed most businesses across the state. Lottery funds subsequently shrunk, while park fees were zero.

"It's a gut punch, we've never been through anything like this before," parks spokesman Chris Havel said.

The layoffs will translate to reduced services at day-use sites and campgrounds across the state, including trash collection, restroom cleaning and maintenance.

Day-use park sites began to reopen in May with limited services. On June 9, several popular campgrounds will reopen, with online reservations starting Wednesday at noon. That will provide some revenue, but it's not expected to be enough.

Havel said visitors can help by packing out trash and bringing their own water, toilet paper and hand sanitizer.

Oregon's parks haven't been in such trouble since the early 1990s, when the parks department was cut off from the Oregon Department of Transportation and left to fend for itself. Officials faced the closure of some 60 state parks before voters approved parks funding through the Oregon Lottery.

"This is a heartbreaking time for our agency family, both for those who face a heavy workload as we roll into summer and for the dedicated professionals we have to release from service," said Lisa Sumption, state parks director.

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