

## **'To Kill a Mockingbird' to build community**

### **Harper Lee classic to be focus of Waukesha Reads**

**By Grant Lynch**

I read Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" when I was 12 years old, because that's what the state of Connecticut told me to do. Or rather, someone who wasn't me had decided that the seventh grade was the ideal time for children to properly absorb the many themes and intricate details found in the text. Unfortunately, that person was wrong, and it was decidedly not the ideal time for me (to say nothing of my peers) to have that particular experience. At 12 years old, I was far more interested in what Calvin and Hobbes were up to than I was to jump headfirst into a weighty self-analysis on the effects of social inequality, race relations, and injustice in our society. I was a child, and I reasoned that those sorts of topics were better suited for the adults to think about anyway, right?

I have no doubt that I dutifully read the book exactly once, and that I completed whatever assignment followed. I probably saw the movie as well, although it is likely that I was more preoccupied with why anyone would film in black and white than I was with gleaning any other valuable life lessons from it. Truth be told, the book slipped through the cracks for me when I was young, and I haven't read it in more than 25 years. It wasn't received well in its original context, but that is hardly any fault of the book. In the past two and a half decades, the words on its pages haven't changed, nor has the plot or the themes within — but I certainly have. I am a completely different person than I was when I was 12, so to read "To Kill a Mockingbird" again is to read it for the first time. Better yet: not only read it, but discuss it, challenge it, and apply its many lessons to my life. How? Enter Waukesha Reads.

Waukesha Reads, the acclaimed and beloved community reading event brought to you by the Waukesha Public Library, in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Arts and more than 40 community partners, enters its tenth iteration in October. Led by committee chair Kori Hall, the Waukesha Reads team is composed of educators, librarians, artisans, and civic, cultural, and social leaders, all of whom volunteer their time to make the program a success. After receiving the largest grant amount awarded for The Big Read program by the NEA — \$20,000 — this year's event will provide more programs, special events, and free copies of the book to our community than ever before. The beauty (and power) of an event like Waukesha Reads is that it not only unites the greater Waukesha community through great books, but that it also reunites us with great books! It has been a long time since I last read "To Kill a Mockingbird," and to read it now is to contrast it against the backdrop of my adult life. Today, I experience watching the innocence of my own children. I have a far better understanding of the limits that a moral compass can go than I did when I was 12. I have seen the same prominent examples of racial inequality as you have, and that has helped shape my understanding of social behavior and injustice. I now have the appropriate context and experience in which to place the book, which means what I can now get out of it as compared to so many years ago is immense.

It is through Waukesha Reads and all of the work of its associated partners, accompanying programs, and community engagement, that I am able to take this journey. Waukesha Reads holds true to its promise, as we are absolutely united through great books, and the events provide us with an incredible opportunity to come together and discuss our thoughts through the vehicle of literature. I urge you to come along, especially if you have read this book long ago, as I did; I am certain that we will both find something in it that we did not see before, and that is too tempting of a prospect to pass up. I cannot wait to get started!

*(Grant Lynch is executive director of the Waukesha Public Library.)*



## Waukesha Reads kicks off this weekend, Friday Night Live ends

WAUKESHA —This weekend marks the 10th time that Waukesha has kicked off its communitywide reading program, which has grown substantially over the years.

The 2016 book selection is the American classic “To Kill A Mockingbird” by Harper Lee. Free copies, as well as event programs, will be handed out during the final Friday Night Live of the season from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. today. The books and programs will also be distributed during the Waukesha Farmers Market from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday.

Look for the Waukesha Reads/NEA Big Read booth at the Five Points tonight and the volunteers dressed in green T-shirts. Also during FNL, a soap carving demonstration will be held at the Waukesha Community Arts Project, 320 South St., to coincide with the kickoff.

During the farmers market, children’s books can be dropped off at the Waukesha Reads booth to be donated to Children’s Books for Hope. Also on Saturday, there will be special “To Kill A Mockingbird” art on display at the Almont Gallery, 342 W. Main St., during the Fall Art Crawl that runs from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. in downtown Waukesha.

— Freeman Staff



## Kicking off Waukesha Reads

### Reads

#### Upcoming Waukesha Reads events

WAUKESHA — When attending today's Farmers Market, be sure to pick up your free copy of "To Kill a Mockingbird" and join the community in the Waukesha Reads program. Waukesha Reads, meant to promote reading and community involvement, chose the novel by Harper Lee as the featured book.

#### Waukesha Reads events this upcoming week include:

- Make your own bird feeder: opportunities for younger children ages 3 to 5 years with an adult from 9:30 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., and for kids ages 6 to 12 years from 4:25 p.m. to 5 p.m. Monday at the Waukesha Public Library, 321 W. Wisconsin Ave., in the Children's Room. Supplies will be provided. For details contact 262-524-3692.
- "Revisiting Making a Murderer: Media Sensationalism and the Steven Avery Case" — 7 p.m. Tuesday regarding the Steven Avery case and the effects of media sensationalism. Jessica McBride, journalist, author, UW-Milwaukee senior lecturer and Freeman columnist, recently published an eBook titled "Rush To Judgment: The Unfiltered Story Of Steven Avery" that takes a second look at the Halbach murder case and the resulting trial. This event will be held at UW-Waukesha's

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**WAUKESHA**  
*Reads*



WAUKESHA — Mary Lamb offers a copy of "To Kill a Mockingbird" to friend Dave Michaelson as volunteers fanned out across downtown Waukesha to distribute copies of the book during the final Friday Night Live of the year. Despite intermittent rain, there was still entertainment, with bands playing inside restaurants, bars and stores. Waukesha Reads set up their headquarters in the lobby of Waukesha Civic Theatre.

Charles Auer/Freeman Staff

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Northview Hall in room 133 at 1500 N. University Drive.

**Waukesha Reads will also hold book discussions this week:**

■ A book discussion about "To Kill a Mockingbird" will be held at noon Tuesday at Meli Bar & Restaurant, 294 W. Main St. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. For more information, contact 262-5423682.

■ A discussion of "Go Set a Watchman," Harper Lee's sequel to "Mockingbird," will be held at 5:45 p.m. Wednesday at Martha Merrell's Books, 231 W. Main St. For more details contact 262-5471060 or [jeantrumpy@gmail.com](mailto:jeantrumpy@gmail.com).

■ A discussion of "To Kill a Mockingbird" with a Braille demonstration will be held from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 6. Literacy for All Incorporation and Freeman columnist Gregg Wandsneider will be discussing the featured literature and will be holding the Braille demonstration. The discussion will be at Pathfinding Book Store at 304 N. East Ave. Contact [cathyk@litforall.org](mailto:cathyk@litforall.org) for more information.

— Andrea Fencl, Freeman Staff



The Miller-Higbee Duo, Kerry Miller and Jeff Higbee, perform in The Steaming Cup during the final Friday Night Live of the year on Friday.

Charles Auer/Freeman Staff