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New West Bloomington Book Bike Makes Debut with Titan Support

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Through fundraising support by an Illinois Wesleyan University student, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP) welcomed a new Book Bike, managed by retired University Librarian Karen Schmidt.

The WBRP is an organization that aids the West Bloomington community with various outreach programs and resources. A large portion of literacy support occurs through the Book Bike – a bike that travels around the community giving out free books in various languages – and it recently received a facelift.

Schmidt who is the project manager for the Book Bike program, has also taught the [Action Research Center \(ARC\) seminar](#) at Illinois Wesleyan.

“It was my honor to teach the ARC seminar occasionally and to work closely with ARC students through my liaison work at The Ames Library and my other public service activities,” said Schmidt. “The Book Bike concept came from my IWU library colleague, (information literacy & scholarly communications librarian) Chris Sweet...it kicked off then and some 12 years later, we are still thriving as a program.”

Since the beginning of the program in 2011, Schmidt has seen a rise in the popularity of the Book Bike, especially among young children.

Fundraising for the new bike yielded about \$4,000 with the help of IWU alumna Olivia Jacobs '21. While taking the Action Research seminar class with ARC director Deborah Halperin, Olivia learned about the Book Bike’s mission. An English major, Olivia collected donations for the new bike through a presentation and giveaways for her senior class project.

“The average reading level in America is at the sixth grade level and I think it’s important that we do what we can to improve accessibility and education in regards to reading and writing,” said Jacobs. “I would say that (director) Halperin made a point in her classes to illustrate how important community engagement is and how to do that.”



The new-and-improved Book Bike will now be seen on the streets of West Bloomington, often driven by retired University Librarian Karen Schmidt.



Schmidt, center, and volunteers stand with the former WBRP Book Bike at a summer event.

Schmidt’s favorite part about managing the Book Bike has been the people.

“Books bring people together, across generations and cultures,” she said. “When a young person shows you a book that changed their life, it is profound.”

Anyone can volunteer to ride the Book Bike, staff the bike at an event or sort donations. WBRP accepts both book donations and monetary donations. For more information, visit the WBRP [website](#).

By MJ Soria '25