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Continuing Todd Bol's mission of sharing

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The act of sharing is a simple concept, one taught from an early age, but its practice can have grand results.

Hudson resident Todd Bol demonstrated just how impactful the idea of sharing could be with his organization Little Free Library, which spread from its beginning in his front yard to an international movement.

Since his death in October, Bol's LFL organization and his family are continuing his legacy of sharing with ventures both familiar and new.

Since Bol installed the very first Little Free Library in memory of his mother, the movement has grown rapidly with more than 75,000 now in neighborhoods around the world.

The origin story is one that Little Free Library staff are happy to tell, said Branden Pedersen of Little Free Library.

The Little Free Library nonprofit, made up of a group of a dozen staff members, will continue the work Bol started, Pedersen said.

Pedersen said the organization is not looking to replace Bol. "That would be a tall order," he said.

Bol was the idea guy, Pedersen said, with a huge personality. For the near future, the organization plans to rely on its team to move forward.

The organization has a couple large grants coming in the new year for future initiatives.

One of these grants will help fund a nationwide initiative to work with Native American communities, Pedersen said. The idea was formed when Little Free Library attended the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums held at Mystic Lake in Prior Lake.

Many tribes are in need of books, good, enjoyable reads, for kids and other residents.

“Some tribes are the size of small U.S. states and they have one public library,” Pedersen said.

So far Little Free Library has seen a good response with many applicants, Pedersen said.

The initiative truly reflects the Little Free Library’s mission to build communities and inspire a love of reading, Pedersen said.

“It’s probably the thing I’m most excited about since I started,” he said. Bol’s legacy will continue to support what he did in life, Pedersen said. His passing put a new spotlight on his work and his nonprofit, he said. Pedersen believes someone will see it, and smile on the organization with a donation.

“And then who knows what we can do,” he said.

The Little Free Library staff will continue to honor what they admired most about their founder – his desire to find ways for people to connect.

The concept of neighborhood sharing was always a goal for Todd Bol. When he created Little Free Library, he imagined how it would get people to stop and browse the books, knowing that even if they didn’t take one, it would inspire a conversation and a connection with their neighbors, Bol’s brother Tony Bol said.

Expanding on that concept of sharing first developed in Little Free Library, Tony Bol will be launching the company Share with Others in the new year.

Tony and Todd Bol had been working on the idea before Todd Bol's death.

Little Free Libraries, by Todd Bol's design, were made so one could be built on its own, without purchasing it through the organization.

"I put my arms way out when I say he helped cultivate a movement, and the movement is this big," Tony Bol said with arms outstretched.

The market is smaller. That was always Todd Bol's intention.

Share with Others will be another piece of the movement he created.

"It's really turned into a concept that's so much bigger than one organization," Tony Bol said.

Little Free Library is a nonprofit, and operates as such, Bol said. Share With Others will be a for profit company with a focus on supporting the culture of sharing and the various nonprofits that advance it.

The set up will mirror other for-profit companies with charitable goals like Love Your Melon, Toms or Newman's Own, Tony Bol said. Reaching the financial impact of Love Your Melon, the local organization that saw national support, is a fine aspiration, Tony Bol said.

Having a for profit company will allow for moving at a faster rate with more flexibility.

"We will be an umbrella that tries to advance the concept of sharing in general," Tony Bol said.

That concept is expansive, Bol said, and will include other focuses in addition to books. The company will sell Little Free Libraries and Little Free Pantries, but will also work to support other grassroots sharing organizations.

"This is where the movement has led," Tony Bol said.

The idea is to revive the days when people would sit on their front porches, enjoying the breeze and talking with neighbors, Tony Bol said.

“What happened to culture is people went inside,” he said.

The culture of sharing, such as having a Little Free Library in a front yard, helps bring back those connections.

“The real thing being shared is humanity,” Tony Bol said. Share with Others has become Tony Bol’s full-time focus.

“I’ve decided that I’m going to dedicate myself to this fulltime and really try to make a mark, make a difference,” he said.

Tony Bol said he’ll know the company is a success when it’s able to be run by family after he is gone.

The whole family, including Todd Bol’s wife Susan and two kids, have been a part of Little Free Libraries and its mission, something Tony Bol said people may not realize.

“The whole family has been highly invested in this concept and we don’t want to give up that energy,” he said.

The family is still supportive of the Little Free Library mission, Tony Bol said, even as he looks to this new venture.

“We support so many of the good programs they do,” he said. “There’s room for everybody.”

Share with Others is just one more way to continue Todd Bol’s legacy.

“He’s not gone,” Tony Bol said.

The website sharewithothers.net will launch on Jan. 2, Todd Bol’s 63rd birthday. An open house will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Jan 19.