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FEATURED

## Newly formed Apple Valley-based organization gives free books to children

by Patty Dexter Oct 25, 2018



From left, Sue Fredericks of Burnsville and Debbie Beck of Apple Valley are the co-founders of The Free Buggie, a newly formed Apple Valley-based organization that collects new and used children's books and distributes them for free to children of all ages around the metro.

Photo by Patty Dexter

### More on The Free Book Buggie

The Free Book Buggie is an Apple Valley-based organization with a mission to "mobilize free books to children of all ages to engage families and communities in cultivating minds." More information about the nonprofit can be found at [thefreebookbuggie.org](http://thefreebookbuggie.org) or by emailing [thefreebookbuggie@gmail.com](mailto:thefreebookbuggie@gmail.com).

Debbie Beck and Sue Fredericks have been passionate about literacy since their now-grown children were younger.

Together they spearheaded a month-long reading and book swap program for 11 years at Sioux Trail Elementary School in Burnsville. So it was no surprise to Fredericks when she got an email this spring about Beck's latest plan for a literacy program.

Beck, an Apple Valley resident, was vacationing in Brazil with her daughter in May and visited the town of Paraty. While they were there, Beck spotted a colorful Volkswagen van with books inside of it and a man sitting nearby selling books on tables.

She immediately got an idea. "It brought back the passion that Sue and I had with kids and books," she recalled, and Beck sent an email to Fredericks.

"I said, 'You're supposed to be on vacation. Turn your brain off,'" Fredericks, a Burnsville resident, added. "But that's not possible."

What resulted was a newly formed Apple Valley-based organization called The Free Book Buggie, which seeks to provide free books to children in underserved neighborhoods around the Twin Cities metro.

The organization collects new or used books and fills up a Toyota Sienna minivan (its "buggie") to take them to different locations, because the Book Buggie is working with a diverse population.

"We believe as an organization, that what's important is for us to make that wheel stronger and not just make more wheels," Beck said. "We didn't want to duplicate. We are very intent on collaborating with nonprofits, churches, schools, day care centers, cities."

### **Beginnings**

Beck said when she got back from Brazil, she researched whether something like this was already being done in the Twin Cities and she didn't find anything.

Together, she and Fredericks recruited more people with a variety of skill sets to be on the organization's founding board, Fredericks said. The other founding board members include Meghan Beck, Debbie Beck's daughter; Kellie Fredericks, Sue Fredericks' daughter; Stephanie Phillips and Luther Huset, college friends of Meghan Beck.

Huset handles the organization's information technology needs. Meghan Beck is a web content writer and grant writer while Phillips is another grant writer and event coordinator. Kellie Fredericks is the organization's graphic designer and her mother, Sue, is in charge of the volunteers. Debbie Beck "is in charge of everything else," Sue Fredericks said.

Debbie Beck registered the organization as a nonprofit with the state of Minnesota on June 13 and received the certificate of incorporation from the Secretary of State on June 19. The organization is currently working to obtain its 501(c)(3) status with the federal government. Since the first meeting on June 26, the board has been meeting about every two weeks, she said.

The Free Book Buggie has gotten numerous books from twice-a-week pickups from Unique Thrift Store in Burnsville, once a month pickups from Half Price Books in Apple Valley and donations from individuals and school teachers.

Books are collected for infant through high school-aged children and sorted into various categories like baby, beginner, intermediate, different activities or seasons and multi-language. Some of the

books are sorted by residents of Orchard Path in Apple Valley, Beck said.

In less than six months, The Free Book Buggie has started to make itself known. It attended its first outreach event in August and has since attended city gatherings, food distributions, clothes giveaways and other community events in locations such as Bloomington, St. Paul and Maplewood.

Beck said they have found the best way to get into communities is to partner with organizations to attend already scheduled events they're invited to. They would eventually like to get to a point where they could set up in a community and give notice to residents and visitors they're there.



A child reads a book she received from The Free Book Buggie while the organization was attending a fall celebration event in Bloomington, Sept. 22.

Photo submitted

"We would really like to thank those we are partnering with – those that are in the community that are helping us to spread this literacy initiative," she said.

During events, tables are set up and The Free Book Buggie volunteers help children pick out a book, usually limited to two per child. They also will read books to the children, Beck said.

### Needs

Beck said the organization already has some good challenges within a few months of starting. They are seeking additional people to serve on the board to help with duties like providing legal guidance and helping with financial matters. More general volunteers are needed to help with social media posts and photographing events.



Bins full of books like this one are currently occupying about half of Apple Valley resident Debbie Beck's garage, and part of her neighbor's garage. The Free Book Buggie is looking for a more permanent space for storing and sorting donated books.

Photo by Patty Dexter

The organization is in need of a more permanent climate-controlled location to sort and store the donated books. Beck said crates and bins of books are occupying about half of her garage and part of a neighbor's garage space.

The Free Book Buggie also is looking for funding to eventually acquire another van so volunteers are able to attend more events at one time.

"As we double up we're spreading ourselves a little thin," Beck said.

Fredericks and Beck said the organization's ultimate goal is to cultivate minds.

"What that means to me is cultivating, is growing. We give books and that helps us to cultivate minds – children and adults," Beck said.

Books can take readers to another place.

"Once they catch onto that concept, then they can read anything. They can go anywhere," Fredericks said.

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