




# Big plans for little libraries

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By [Leslie Linthicum / Of the Journal](#)

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Charlie Johnson, 3, checks out the books at the Little Free Library in Patricia Cassidy Park in the Northeast Heights, then excitedly leaves with his choice. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

**Leslie Linthicum**



**UPFRONT**

Fifteen students at the University of New Mexico's School of Architecture and Planning are hard at work in a competition to design public libraries – perhaps the smallest public libraries ever put out to a design competition.

The specifications are this: The library cannot exceed 36 inches by 36 inches by 36 inches. It should require little or no maintenance. And it must be able to be built within an \$800 budget.

Handcrafted little boxes on posts are spread across the world, more than 10,000 Little Free Libraries filled with books for the taking – and the giving.

From Palm Springs, Calif., to Bangor, Maine, and from Iceland to the Congo, book lovers have adopted the do-it-yourself "take one, leave one" motto to promote literacy through neighborhood lending libraries.

New Mexico, and especially Albuquerque, has been slow to catch on to this trend, with only a handful sprinkled around the state. So the competition at UNM is designed to put Albuquerque on the Little Free Library map – the literal map at [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org).

Bob Shipley, a retired engineer, businessman and teacher, helped to launch the UNM competition because he's an avid reader and an adult literacy volunteer who believes more books available to more people in more locations is good for communities.

He's a board member and an adult literacy tutor for Reading Works, and can't help but think that having a free lending library stocked with interesting books for people of all ages in a neighborhood can only encourage more reading among the people who live there.

"Literacy in this state is a major problem," Shipley told me. "I'm just concerned about solutions."

In partnership with Bernalillo County, the winning design will be manufactured and installed throughout the county – one in each county commissioner's district.

Bernadette Miera, Bernalillo County's cultural services manager, said those first five little libraries will be placed in public places – maybe in parks or outside community centers. She's excited to see how people respond to them, and hopes they catch on and the program expands.

"We have wonderful libraries," Miera said, "but often people don't use them. This is very hands-on. And it's sort of a social connection. You pick a book and think, 'I wonder who had this book before? Did they pass it on because they found it interesting? Or because they didn't find it interesting?' There's a fun connection."

Blueprints for all of the designs will be made available at [littlelibrarynm.org](http://littlelibrarynm.org) and on [berncogov](http://berncogov) on the cultural services page, along with materials lists, so anyone can make a library for his or her own front yard.

"It's got some amazing opportunities for community unity and sharing," Shipley told me. "It's available 24/7. People interact with it at a kind of intimate level; there's an exchange. And they can be put up in any neighborhood, anywhere."

*UpFront is a daily front-page news and opinion column. Comment directly to Leslie at 823-3914 or [llinthicum@abqjournal.com](mailto:llinthicum@abqjournal.com). Go to [abqjournal.com/letters/new](http://abqjournal.com/letters/new) to submit a letter to the editor.*



Bob Shipley reads along with the Johnson brothers, Will, left, and Charlie, right, as they explore the new books they picked from the Little Free Library in the Northeast Heights. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)



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