



Nancy Hatfield, a library assistant at the Yakima Valley Regional Library, closes the glass front of a display case showcasing her choices for July reading material. Every six weeks, Hatfield selects books and a theme and decorates two sidewalk display windows at the downtown Yakima library. "It's the best job in the library as far as I'm concerned," she says. "Except for the winter."

Lock at Books

Bibliophile lends artistic touch to library's window displays

By JANE GARGAS
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

Nancy Hatfield does windows — heavenly ones.

Exotic, knock-your-eyes-out, intriguing windows.

She creates window displays for the main branch of the Yakima Valley Regional Library.

As such, she's the unofficial spokesperson who beckons passersby to "come inside and take a book."

Her work is seen in two rotating displays: the long, angular glass case outside the children's wing and the L-shaped window by the front door on North Third Street.

"They're the first and last thing that people see in the library," Hatfield says.

Sometimes bold, sometimes subtle, always thought-provok-

ing, Hatfield's windows evoke emotional responses to the treasures inside.

And just as her artistry offers a window into the core of the library, it also offers one to her creative soul.

"I think Nancy has incredible talent," says regional library director Monica Weyhe. "I really look forward to her new displays."

Officially, Hatfield works in the technical services department as a library assistant, repairing books, videos and CDs.

"I love making books whole," she says.

"A library is a wonderful place to work, with the whole thrust of the window material available to people," Hatfield says. There's a good vibe behind that."

Dressing windows makes the work even more appealing.

"It's definitely one of the best parts of my job," she says. And feedback from admiring patrons in "the most joyful," Hatfield adds.

For the next month or so, the front window will entice viewers with pictures of comfortable chairs, counterpointed with a row of library books chosen to reflect eclectic tastes — gardening, cooking, fiction, or Hatfield's favorite, biographies.

While school is out, the children's window always follows the theme of the summer reading program — this year it's "Every Trail Leads to a Good Book" — so the window is fresh with footprints winding in and out of you-know-whats.

Just about anything can show

up in one of Hatfield's windows, which change every six weeks.

It might be a picture of Big Bird, of "Sesame Street," ensconced in a sunflower, Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, peering over books; a mandala, the circular symbol of harmony used in Eastern meditation; kites to herald spring, or vignettes of William Shakespeare, questioning whether "To read or not to read."

Once a year, Hatfield commemorates National Poetry Month with such fancifuls as paper butterflies imaled on pins to highlight "Poetry Gives Wings to Words," or happy cross-sections of gray matter for "Your Brain on Poetry."

Sometimes themes just

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spring into her mind: for instance, she created a display on yoga positions, accompanied by the banner, "Reading Stretches Your Mind."

"Why did the chicken cross the road?" teased one window, filled with food. The answer, of course, was "To get to the library."

"I do a lot of whimsy," Hatfield explains. Says Weyhe, "I'm really pleased to have an artist of her caliber on staff. And besides that, she's a delightful person to work with."

Whenever possible, Hatfield adds three-dimensional elements: pinwheels for flowers, catcalls peeking out of a cowboy boot, socks turned into animal puppets, paper fish mobiles.

Her images come from magazines, old calendars and a stash of paper: wrapping, rice, tissue, anything with interesting textures and colors.

She spends much quality time with her scissors.

"I'm good at cutting and pasting. And I'm a bit of a jokester."

A collage artist, Hatfield honed her talent by studying photography at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, and art at the University of Washington.

Four years ago, she inherited the job of library-window artist from Kathy Hay. Hatfield says she's striven to continue her pre-



BRIAN FITZGERALD/Yakima Herald-Republic

An eclectic selection of books graces the window display at the front of the Yakima Valley Library's downtown Yakima branch.

decessor's quality work.

Born in Yakima, Hatfield left home for schooling but returned in 1981 to take care of her now-deceased grandmother, whom she credits with infusing her with an artistic bent.

Employed part time at the library for nearly 15 years, Hatfield fashions her life around applying her talent — "Using creativity is vital to my day-to-day existence," she explains — and living as simply as possible.

She's never owned a house or

car and gets around by bicycle or on the bus.

The latter once served as inspiration for a window called "Read and Ride." In it, she used photographs of Yakima Transit employees, driving paper buses filled with passengers, cut from "Far Side" cartoons.

Hatfield's other creative outlets include decorating Aracana chicken eggs, designing one-of-a-kind greeting cards ("I try to get up every day and think 'Who needs a card today?'" and making collages from pressed wildflowers.

When her wildflower collages were displayed in a Yakima gallery a few years ago, they all sold.

"People say I should be selling my cards and things, but I resist because I want to keep it fun," she says.

Daily inspiration comes from a 90-minute bike ride she takes each summer evening on quiet Yakima streets.

"That time regenerates creativity for me, absorbing all those smells and textures. There's no better way to experience the world than on a bike on a summer night," she says. Hatfield returns from her rides rejuvenated, ready to train her eye on the next library window she'll design.

It's her way of proving, through a glass brightly, that libraries have wondrous things inside.