

'A little act of kindness': Wheeling girl builds grocery pantry for local library



Wheeling resident Maya Schaab, 9, arranges items inside the small pantry she and her dad built for the Indian Trails Public Library. Anyone can get free canned goods or other groceries there --or donate such items. (Russell Lissau | Staff Photographer)

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A small grocery repository has been installed outside Wheeling's Indian Trails Public Library to help people struggling to afford food or personal care products.

The house-shaped, wooden pantry -- resembling many of the Little Free Library book exchanges that can be found across the suburbs and around the world -- stands on a post on the north side of the library at 355 Schoenbeck Road, near the drive-through lane.

Anyone can take a can or two or leave items.

The miniature pantry -- possibly among the first in the Northwest or North suburbs -- was the brainchild of Indian Trails patron and Wheeling resident Maya Schaab, who celebrates her birthday each year with public service projects.

"I really like helping people and animals," said Maya, who turned 9 this week. "A little act of kindness can help people a lot."

Maya's latest project was inspired by a novel titled "Shelter," by Christie Matheson. It's about a homeless fifth-grader named Maya and her struggles.

"It became one of my favorite books," the real-life Maya said. "It inspired me to do something for my community to help people who are experiencing food insecurity."

Once library officials approved the pantry concept, Maya teamed with her father, Matt, to construct it.

"Building it with my dad was amazing," Maya said. "I really enjoyed it."

Text on the glass door identifies the box as "Maya's Little Free Pantry." A friendly message is inscribed there, too: "Take what you need, leave what you can."

As of this week, the pantry was stocked with cans of sliced carrots, diced tomatoes, soup and more. Toothbrushes, baby food and several cans of cat food were available, as well.

Maya and her family are responsible for keeping the pantry stocked and maintained. They check on it every other day.

"We're very proud of her, that she's thinking about other people around her birthday at such a young age," mom Olivia Schaab said.

Maya and her parents were honored for their efforts at a recent library board meeting.

"She shows a lot of leadership initiative for a rising fourth-grader," library spokeswoman Jen Schmidt said.

As with Little Free Libraries, a website invites people to register miniature pantries so others can find them. The site, littlefreepantry.org, includes an interactive map.

The pantry at Indian Trails is the first to be registered in the Wheeling area. Others can be found in East Dundee, Elgin, St. Charles, Glen Ellyn, Warrenville and Aurora, to name a few suburban locations.

To support Maya's pantry, just stop by and leave nonperishable items inside. You can also make a financial donation at gofund.me/75d407fo.