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Chesterfield Observer

FAMILY



The Harry hype How locals reacted to the final "Potter" book

By Katherine Peters
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Eighteen-year-old Mya Clarke and 15-year-old Bryan Kauder had never met before the morning of July 20 this year. But one minute after midnight on July 21, the two teenagers could have been mistaken for lifelong friends.

The two congratulated each other excitedly after leaving the cash registers at the Huguenot Road Barnes & Noble, clutching the bookstore's first and second copies of the long-awaited "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows."

Released at midnight on July 21, the book is the final installment in the famed series, which has sold 325 million copies worldwide since 1997, making it the biggest children's book series ever. Fans bought a record-breaking 8.3 million copies of "Deathly Hallows" in the first 24 hours, according to publisher Scholastic's Web site. The series has spawned themed games, clothes, toys, school supplies and a whole Hogwarts culture.

Clarke, who claimed the first copy, arrived at Barnes & Noble at 5:30 a.m. the previous day - over three hours before the store opened - even though he had already pre-ordered the book.

"And I haven't slept at all," Clarke laughed. "I'm going to read it all in one night - all night long!"

But why would someone wait so long for just a book?

"We'll have no other chance to do this in our entire lives," said Bryan, who read the previous installment, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince," four times and arrived at the store just minutes after Clarke at 6 a.m.

Bryan's answer was backed up by the tangible excitement from hundreds of people around him. The two Barnes & Noble stores in Chesterfield either approached or exceeded their maximum occupancy as the midnight release approached.

So just how many copies of "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows" were sold in Chesterfield?

"We have to stay pretty tight-lipped about that," said Jeff Ham, store manager for the Huguenot Barnes & Noble. While he said that the company has been very clear about not giving out sales information, "I can tell you this: it was more successful than the last book."

At the release, no one was turned away, but the Huguenot store resembled Times Square on New Year's Eve, with standing room only and almost as much noise. Ham did not deny reports of line tickets in the 600's, which did not include parents and friends. The store's maximum occupancy is 1,100 people.

At the smaller Commonwealth Centre Barnes & Noble, however, the line stretched around the building, as those waiting for their copy far exceeded the store's maximum occupancy of 585.

"We met our occupancy level at 8 o'clock," said Vickie O'Shea, store manager. Those inside were able to participate in themed games and activities or just enjoy the company of the hundreds of other Potter fans. "It was really exciting - everybody was just having the best time," she said.

County libraries also celebrated the book's release with Potter Parties in each branch (with the exception of the Meadowdale branch which is currently under construction),



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Kelly Johnston picks out a copy of "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows" at the Costco on Hull Street Road. The book sold 8.3 million copies during the first 24 hours after its release.

and each party filled to capacity.

Joy Stenner joined the party at the Midlothian Library with her three children, Katy, 4, Sara, 4, and Sam, 7. What started out as books on tape for Sam became a family event as they read the next book together. "We finished the whole thing - it took us nine months," Stenner said. "We're getting [the final book] this weekend and starting on it."

Costumes abounded, for library staff and guests alike, as children went under the sorting hat, transplanted "mandrakes," and made magic potions that doubled as root beer floats.

But the excitement wasn't just in the parties.

"Right now, because of the release of the last book and the new movie now, everything's been checked out now for the last two or three weeks. It's system-wide," said Jennifer Shepley, Midlothian's branch manager. The number of holds is a testimony to how far the phenomenon has spread.

Chesterfield County definitely celebrated the release like some kind of holiday. But for all the hoopla and hubbub, what is it about a book series that gets everyone involved?

"This is my childhood right here," said Lindsay Morgan, 18, while standing in line for her book. She's been coming to the midnight releases since the release of the third book, "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban."

"This is a work of fiction, yet it's bringing together all these different generations and lifestyles," she speculated. "I don't see anything else...doing this."

Mark Anderson, dressed in a mismatched shirt and tie with a flowing black robe and cane, was among the oldest of the Harry Potter fans at the Huguenot Barnes & Noble. He completed his costume with authentic grey hair, and added his mature viewpoint to the scene around him.

"We needed this," said Anderson, age 55, as children and their parents brushed past. "As many crazy things are going on in the world today, we needed a story...where good actually wins over evil. Good can still win over evil - whether Harry makes it or not, who knows!"