

Civic leader's latest chapter: kid's books

Lorene Burkhart plans publishing business that will benefit local not-for-profits

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Local entrepreneur and philanthropist Lorene Burkhart can now add author to her array of titles.

Her latest endeavor, Burkhart Network LLC, is a book-publishing enterprise that will use sales proceeds from the works she writes to support local not-for-profits. At 73, the idea to try her hand as an author came to Burkhart about three years ago, as she approached her seventh decade.

"I thought, 'Hmm, I probably have 20 good years left, so what am I going to do now?'" she recalled. "I've been a publisher, TV and radio personality; I've done a lot of interesting things. So I thought, 'Why not start writing a book?'"

Burkhart's first, "An Accidental Pioneer: A Farm Girl's Drive to the Finish," was released in September and tells the tale of her childhood growing up on a farm in southern Indiana. Published locally, the book generated regional interest and helped Burkhart learn the industry.

Now she's ready to jump in with both feet. The company's first offering, "Raccoon Tales," is a children's board book featuring a removable raccoon tail that hangs from the book's spine and might be placed on a backpack or tricycle. In addition, plush 5-inch toy raccoons that come in four striped-tail colors to match the raccoon characters in the stories accompany the books.

The story, for tykes ages 2 to 4, could be sold in places such as the Indianapolis Zoo, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis and perhaps privately owned children's bookstores and shops that sell kids' clothing. The idea is to test the books and products locally before possibly rolling them out nationally.

Besides "Raccoon Tales," Burkhart has several books about animals in various stages of production that can be published throughout the next 18 months, she said. "Farm Tales," for instance, is a series of stories about different farm animals.

Burkhart initially expects to publish 2,000 copies of each, with more to follow, if the books are licensed for national distribution.

Proceeds from the various children's books could benefit local charities, such as a children's hospital, Burkhart said. Formal agreements are still being worked out.

All told, Burkhart envisions publishing up to a dozen children's books and maybe four other types. One of those should be a book set for publication next year about women who have pulled their lives together after confronting difficult situations.

In keeping with her company's philosophy to donate proceeds to charity, funds from that piece of work would be given to an organization that assists abused women, Burkhart said.

"It's about giving what I have learned in life," she said. "That is the purpose of every book that I am doing. It's things that have to do with values and how to be a better person. Even with the children's

books, they have a moral story to them."

To be sure, Burkhart has much to share. The widow of *IBJ* founder John Burkhart has served on 30 community boards and is a former board president of Meals on Wheels and the Arts Council of Indianapolis, the latter of which she was the first female to lead. She founded the Center for Families at Purdue University, her alma mater, and participated in several fundraising campaigns for the college. Burkhart was a longtime trustee for the

University of Indianapolis as well.

"I've had all these different experiences that I can pull together at this stage of life," she said. "It's very exciting."

She's helping others to do that also. Her "Everyone Has A Story" handbook guides folks through the process of documenting moments in their lives that can be recollected in a memoir.

Assisting her with her new venture are about a dozen professionals working on a contractual basis to publish the books. •



Lorene Burkhart and her latest book