

Elmhurst Public Library goes back to school with exhibit of vintage lunch boxes

BY ANNEMARIE MANNION
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The vintage lunch boxes on display at the Elmhurst Public Library no longer contain peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, Twinkies or shiny apples. But they still offer food for thought.

The exhibit behind a glass case in the lobby's entry foyer was designed by Cheryl Moore, the library's new public information officer.

She said the library is trying to make the space more meaningful for patrons.

"We want it to be an exhibit that would interest the community and tie into the library," she said.

The lunch box theme was ideal for September and returning to school, said Catherine Ingram, head of adult services.

"It's something for people to look at and reminisce about going back to school," she said.

Who doesn't want to take a trip down memory lane to recall when they carried a Wonder Woman lunch box to school? Or when they were the proud owner of an Empire Strikes Back box? What was cooler in 1982 then toting a box featuring the image of David Hasselhoff? No, this box is not commemorating Baywatch. It is from the 1980's era Knight Rider television show.

Some of the facts noted inside the colorful exhibit are interesting and others boggle the mind.

According to the exhibit notes, lunch boxes were first used by miners who used tobacco tins to carry their meals to work.

The first lunch box based on a children's television show was manufactured in 1950 by a company then based in Chicago, Aladdin Industries. It featured images from

the Hopalong Cassidy show. And, for a fact sure to astonish: A Superman lunch box circa 1954 sold at auction for \$11,500 in 2,000.

The boxes are considered such icons of American culture that the Smithsonian Institution organized an exhibition of them in 2004.

The boxes displayed in Elmhurst are from Ingram's own collection. The Empire Strikes Back box was once carried by Ingram's husband, Rick Brandwein of Villa Park. It still contains a thermos and Brandwein's old crayons.

Other boxes displayed are based on a range of popular, cultural images, from the \$6 Million Man, to a World War II-era box with a Rosie the Riveter-style image of a female factory worker and even one that features pictures of Hindu deities.

Characters that today's children will recognize also are on view including a Sponge Bob Squarepants box, one depicting Curious George, and one depicting the Power Puff Girls.

The ones that recall television shows of yesteryear seem to get the most notice.

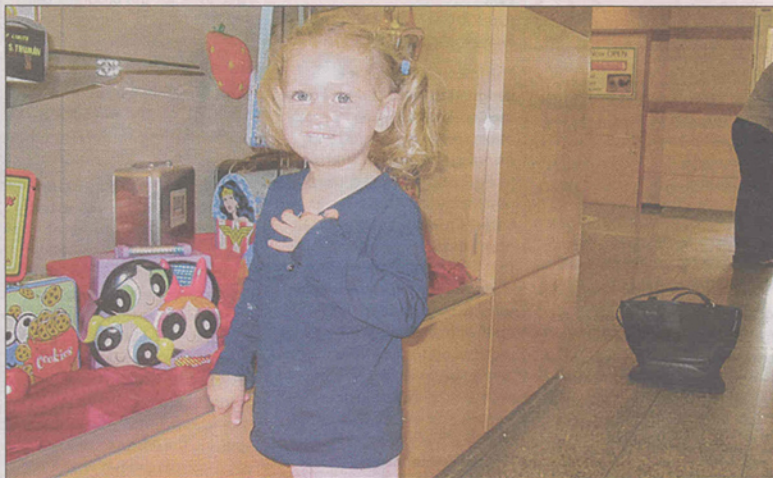
"People go up and say, 'Oh, I had that one when I was a kid,'" said Heidi Line who staffs the circulation desk nearby.

Young and old alike find the lunch box exhibit interesting. Two-year-old Samantha Voirol of Elmhurst toddled to the glass case and pointed to a powder blue box with a Disney Cinderella theme.

That one happens to be Moore's favorite, too.

"I personally like the Disney Princess one. It's just pretty," she said.

The exhibit continues through Sept. 30 at the Elmhurst Public Library, 125 S. Prospect Ave. For information, call 630-279-8696.



Samantha Voirol, 2, of Elmhurst liked a Disney princess box displayed in the exhibit.

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In one of her first tasks as public information officer, Cheryl Moore, above, organized the exhibit.