

Salem native co-authors book about ‘Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood’

Book signing set
February 22 at
Bryan-Bennett
Library

BY DENNIS ROSENBERGER

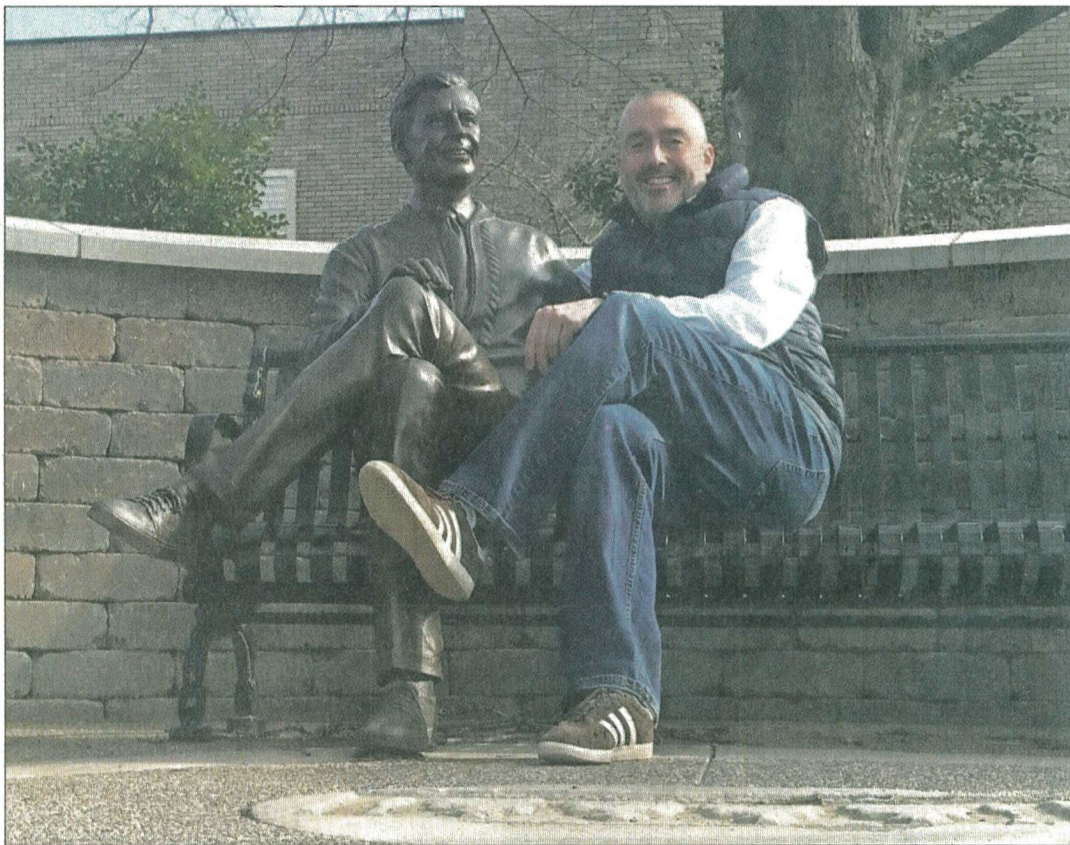
Editor

Salem native Tim Lybarger has spent the last 10 years creating an online archive of all things related to Fred Rogers and the “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” television show, and last year he published a book featuring photos and stories about the beloved children’s television personality.

Lybarger will be at the Bryan-Bennett Library in Salem on Saturday, February 22, for a book signing for “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood: A Visual History” from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

He explained that his involvement with the book grew out of the work that he has done on The Neighborhood Archive, a website he created to document anything and everything associated with the classic kids’ show.

According to Lybarger, the book was already in the works at Clarkson Potter, an imprint



(Submitted Photo)

Tim Lybarger sits on a bench next to a statue of Fred Rogers during a visit to Latrobe, Pennsylvania, while working on the book “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood: A Visual History.”

of Penguin Random House, when the initial author assigned to the project reached out to him.

“With the movie that just came out last fall, featur-

ing Tom Hanks, the folks at Clarkson Potter had the idea to do such a book and they proposed it to one of the other authors, Melissa Wagner, and as she was starting to research

stuff she came across what I have been doing online for the past 10 years or so,” said Lybarger. “So she contacted me

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and asked me if I would be interested in being a part of the writing team and the two of us started working on it."

And they eventually added a third person to the team, Jenna McGuggan, to help finish the book, according to Lybarger.

He explained that The Neighborhood Archive started out as an idea that grew into a reality.

"Several years ago, I was looking for some information online about a Mister Rogers record that I had as a kid, and there was nothing out there that was an all-encompassing resource of all of these things that Fred Rogers had done in his decades long career," said Lybarger. "I just thought it was kind of a shame, since he was so influential over generations, that there was nothing out there where people could go to find all of the great things that he had done."

So Lybarger decided to do something about it.

"I thought, since there was nothing out there, who better to get something going than me," he said. "I started it out as a blog, just to see if there was any interest and to get a feel for what kind of response there might be, and it just caught on like wildfire. I started hearing from people right away."

After doing the blog for about a year, Lybarger said he had accumulated a wealth of information and decided that it all needed to be organized into a website of its own.

"So that's where The Neighborhood Archive site came into play," he said.

It didn't take long before Lybarger's site was noticed by people associated with

Rogers.

"The folks in Pittsburgh, at Fred Rogers Productions, kind of caught wind of what I was doing and they contacted me and we started working together, unofficially, and they provided me with information to document," he said.

The site features information about just about anything that has ever been associated with Fred Rogers and "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," according to Lybarger.

"The tag line on the website is 'A collection of all things Mister Rogers', and essentially, that's what it is," he said. "There's information about everything from really detailed documentation of every episode of the television show to song lyrics, albums, books and more."

He explained that people can even find information about the various times references to Rogers have come up in popular culture.

"In 'Seinfeld,' for example, he popped up in the background on a poster in one episode," said Lybarger.

As for the book, Lybarger said the recent resurgence of interest in Fred Rogers, with the Tom Hanks movie "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" coming out last year and a documentary "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" released in 2018, it just seemed like the right time for the project.

And the authors actually got cooperation from Sony Pictures, the studio that released "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" to get access to information that was used in "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: A Visual History."

"The last section of the book is dedicated to the cre-

ation of the film," said Lybarger. "We worked with Sony, who provided us with some photographs and information as they recreated the old show for the movie."

And that cooperation with the filmmakers led to another interesting development for the book, he added.

"Our forward was actually written by Tom Hanks," said Lybarger.

"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: A Visual History" features an array of photographs from throughout the television show's run, according to Lybarger.

"There is also a good amount of text to it, because we have a lot of individual interviews with different people who were actually involved with the show 'Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," he explained. "But the majority of the book includes very vibrant photographs and a lot of stuff that hasn't been seen before."

The photographs in the book came from several different sources.

"A lot of them came from The Fred Rogers Center in Latrobe, Pennsylvania," Lybarger explained. "And a few photos we were able to get from various photographers."

He noted that it should appeal to anyone, like himself, who watched the show when they were younger.

"People who grew up with the show will just be amazed at the nostalgia that comes up in them as they look through this," said Lybarger.

As a Salem native, Lybarger is excited to be coming back to town to share his work with the community during the upcoming book signing on February 22.

"I used to work at Bryan-Bennett Library when I

was in high school," he said. "So to go back and do a book signing at the library where I worked more than 20 years ago, it's just a cool and surreal experience."

And Bryan-Bennett Library director Kim Keller is looking forward to hosting the book signing with Lybarger.

"Tim grew up in this area," said Keller. "People here went to school with him and we're looking forward to welcoming him home during the book signing."

Lybarger attended Selma-ville Grade School and graduated from Salem Community High School in 1994. He is the son of Bob and the late Susan Lybarger. He currently works as a school counselor in Mahomet, Illinois.

Lybarger notes that his love for "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" is based on the message that Fred Rogers put into all of his work.

"On the surface, it just sounds kind of crazy that I'm in my early 40s and I'm spending all this time documenting a kids' show host but as you go a little deeper, that's what got me interested in Mister Rogers', and Fred Rogers overall," he explained. "It's just his overall message, when you sit back and realize that this kids' show we all watched when we were younger is so much deeper than just a guy and his puppets telling stories."

"His message is one that can be applied to anybody, whether they're 3 years old or 43 years old," Lybarger added. "It's just a message of being proud of who you are, self acceptance, finding the value in other people ... I think it's just something that, universally, people want to hear and long for."