

# L valley LIFE

Written by **Natalie K. Pollock** staff writer | Photographs by **Natalie K. Pollock**

## Shhh! Book lovers are reading together in silence



Silent Book Club readers at Playhouse on Park reveal the many different titles they selected.

**A**vid readers are joining silent book clubs across the country and choosing to come together in a designated place or on a time-specific Zoom call. They select their own book to read, rebelling against the notion of decision by committee, and read silently side-by-side or within sight of each other, rather than vocally in a traditional book club setting. What silent readers crave most is a sense of connection with others without the typical book club rules. What was lost during the pandemic is being reclaimed in a new and comfortable way.

The Avon Free Public Library will be celebrating one year of silent reading in June with refreshments and a book giveaway, a gathering that is out of the norm for their silent book club but was suggested by them. The group of 40 meets in smaller numbers once a month on Monday evenings, except from December through March.

Taylor Skorski, currently Avon's adult reference librarian, worked in the children's department a year ago and then began running this new kind of book club. They pointed out that some silent clubs have sprung up at universities and colleges, where they forge relationships with bookstores, such as Wesleyan University with the R.J. Julia bookstore, and the University of Hartford, which partners with the River Bend bookshop, Real Art Ways and the Playhouse on Park theater.

"A [traditional] book club can be intimidating. Our readers get here at 6:00, they bring in a book or browse our stacks to find one. Then we read for 45 minutes. Or they don't read if they don't want to. At 6:45 they can come over [to a social area] to talk if they want to. They can talk about what they're reading. This is about a

community of people sharing," said Skorski.

The Avon library has also started a crafting group that attracts people who have just moved into the area.

"They don't know many people and want a safe place to meet someone new," Skorski added.

Readers are encouraged to read whatever they would like, fiction or nonfiction, and to feel free to share about what they are reading.

"It's an appointment with yourself. It's my time to read books that I enjoy [rather than those I have to]. I love crafts or fiction or cooking. It was my New Year's resolution," said the librarian.

As the readers stream in with books in their hands, they are invited to sit anywhere in an open area with cozy chairs and natural light, overlooking the courtyard. Or they can sit together at a long table if they prefer. The choice is theirs.

"There are silent book clubs around the globe. The map is astonishing. There is something about it. Introverts or shy people don't have to feel they need the right answer. It takes a couple of months to get comfortable with each other. Not all of them have been library users but now they are coming to the library," said Skorski.

Meg Aldrich of Simsbury has been attending the silent book club at the University of Hartford as part of the Presidents' College Lifelong Learning program for several years, and she has volunteered to assist with marketing.

"There is a national movement of silent book clubs. Since the pandemic we've noticed some younger and mid-career people at our classes. Seniors who take part in adult education [including book clubs] may have a lower risk of dementia according to the 2023 Surgeon Gener-

al's General Advisory. We introduced a popular silent book club several years ago. Meet-ups are twice per semester at venues like Real Art Ways and Playhouse on Park," said Aldrich.

She recounted that a young woman who attends their silent book club meetings has founded clubs for twenty-somethings and has held an out-loud book club at a brew pub recently. Two young women who met at the silent book club last November have become friends and returned to the club this spring.

The Presidents' College Lifelong Learning program targets the 65 and over demographic. It offers lectures and short non-credit courses taught by professors and community leaders. Dr. Michele K. Troy, director of the Presidents' College and professor of English at the University of Hartford's Hillyer College, is credited for being the first person in the Hartford area to suggest the forming of a silent book club.

"We welcome people to [what we call] The Introvert's Happy Hour (extroverts are welcome too). There are now 500 clubs in 50 countries, all run by volunteers. At the Presidents' College we socialize the first and last half-hours and have silent reading in the middle hour. The first one was in San Francisco in 2012, before Covid. Here it started in 2020. We have found this program to be totally intergenerational," said Troy.

They hold their programs at Real Art Ways and the River Bend Bookshop in West Hartford, which provides cross-marketing opportunities for all involved organizations and attracts a more diverse crowd than the academic environment might.

"Those involved with our silent book club sometimes start their own and sometimes they attend more than one book club. They all say they want to read more. Sometimes people read

the same book and gravitate to each other," she said.

There are meetings planned for this fall: on October 17 at Playhouse on Park and November 15 at Real Art Ways. They are usually scheduled from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

"We appeal to those who are still in the working world. They leave work at 3:30 or 5, have dinner, and then come to the book club," said the English professor and head of Presidents' College.

Aldrich added that their readers are all over the board in age and work schedule, "but they are all committed to reading." She sees "a thirst for this kind of club post-Covid, a happening in innovation."

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For more general information about Silent Book Clubs visit [silentbook.club/pages/about-us](https://silentbook.club/pages/about-us). For more information about the Presidents' College programs including lectures, short courses and the silent book club, visit [pccollege@hartford.pc](mailto:pccollege@hartford.pc) or all 860-768-4495.

For more on the upcoming, one-year celebration of the Silent Book Club at Avon Free Public Library on June 17, visit <https://www.avonclibrary.info/events/tag/silent-book-club/>



ABOVE At the University of Hartford's Presidents' College program director Dr. Michele Troy (left) and Meg Austin, retired corporate marketing director of Simsbury, work together on the Silent Book Club.



ABOVE Taylor Skorski, the adult reference librarian at the Avon Free Public Library, understands that the traditional book club could be intimidating to some readers.



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