



Press Release

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Texas State Library and Archives Commission

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Longtime Talking Book volunteer donates \$20,000 to Texas State Library and Archives Commission

AUSTIN - Twice a week for over 18 years Tom Sweazea has been heading to the fourth floor of the Lorenzo de Zavala State Archives and Library Building to volunteer his time to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission's (TSLAC) Talking Book Program as a monitor, reviewer and narrator.

Now Sweazea has donated \$20,000 toward the purchase of a new recording booth for the program through the Friends of Libraries & Archives of Texas. He is dedicating it to the memory of his mother, Lou Hill.

"She was most proud of my work with the Talking Book Program," said Sweazea about his mother who was an Abilene native. Along with his father Bud, together they operated a horse cutting, breeding and prize show business in Georgetown for 40 years. "That was an easy choice for a dedication."

Bud died in 1987 and his mother Lou passed away in December of 2007. An employee recognition ceremony will be held at TSLAC on Tuesday, July 22, 2008, to honor his donation to the Talking Book Program.

Sweazea started volunteering with the program on June 7, 1990, and has been a model for volunteerism since. He has been recognized for over 2,200 hours of volunteer time and is only one of two people with such a high number of hours. His recording sessions with other volunteers are renowned for being filled with humor and laughter but with a sense of commitment to produce great narratives.

"He is a great jolly bear of a human being," said Craig York, lead audio technician with the Talking Book Program. "Obviously he is dedicated to the program."

Sweazea, a 49-year old senior engineer with Crossroads Systems and lifelong Austin area native, said that he continues to volunteer because it fills his need for leisure reading.

"I work in such a technical field that is full of technical manuals," said Sweazea, who jokingly said that the cookies at the Talking Book Program are another great incentive. "This gives me the chance to relax with good Texas literature and do good things for good people."

Not wanting to sound corny, Sweazea said that it was President George H. W. Bush's One Thousand Points of Light address about giving back to the community that strengthened his commitment to volunteerism. Remembering his first day, Sweazea said that he was terrified because he was given an "awful" story about a bulldozer and a bridge to read.

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“I sucked,” said Sweazea who acknowledged that he was immediately offered another volunteer position as a monitor and a reviewer. Now Sweazea has a few readings under his belt, mostly magazine readings according to Stephen Miles Lewis, audio production administrator with the Talking Book Program.

“He is a loud, voiceful and friendly person who is hands-on and is into computers and electronics,” said Lewis. “His thousands of volunteer hours speak for itself.”

Lewis said at the last volunteer appreciation party, which had a Western theme, Sweazea made paperweights from bullets and decorated the office. His addition to the decor included a real wagon wheel.

York and Lewis also said that Sweazea aids in resolving technical problems along with sharing his love of exchanging DVDs of Godzilla and science fiction genre movies.

The Talking Book Program (TBP) is a free library service for people who are unable to read standard print and are blind or have a visual, physical or reading disability. TBP mails books and magazines to a patron’s home. TBP has 80,000 book titles and 80 magazine titles available in Braille, cassettes and large print format, and almost 3,000 titles available in downloadable digital audio format. All services are free including usage of a cassette player and postage.

“He is one of a kind,” said Peggy D. Rudd, TSLAC director and librarian. “His commitment is a real testament to his belief in the work of the Talking Book Program. Patrons describe TBP as a lifeline. It is people like Tom that make that lifeline possible.”

The Talking Book Program is a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and a regional library of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress. For more information visit www.TexasTalkingBooks.org. Patrons can begin Talking Book Program service by calling 1-800-252-9605.

To join the Friends of Libraries and Archives of Texas, contact Charlotte McCann, director of development, at (512) 936-2505 or by email at friends@tsl.state.tx.us. More information can be found at www.texaslibraryfriends.org.

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