

# Cull Lumber, Reused Wood Shingles and Old Paint/Varnish Turned Into a Global Constellation of 80 “Little Free Libraries”

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Boulder built “Little Free Library” installed at the South Pole, Antarctica, November 2020. There 80 such Boulder built units in operation on 5 continents and communities across northern Colorado.

*Photo by Yuya Makino*



Winter home of the library in the Atmospheric Research Observatory (ARO), South Pole. Complete winter darkness lasts 6 months and can reach  $-150^{\circ}$  F. The bright swath of stars is the Milky Way and the green beam is a laser to measure particles in the air.

## Little Free Libraries: from a “one off” to a “constellation”.

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I got started building Little Free Libraries when my daughter, who had just moved into a “transitional housing area” in St. Louis, MO, asked me to build one for her. I did using recycled lumber and old cedar shingles from a house reroof. She gets books by the pound from a Goodwill store and the children in the neighborhood scoop them up. She and her husband were honored with a St. Louis “Kick Ass” award in 2013 for their library #2992 (see pages In 2020, she expanded the library into a free food pantry which is getting heavy usage. She stocks is regularly with canned food and dry staples. See story and photo in the link below where the library is shown and there is an interview with the docents Alicia Schnell and Alan Shutko.

<https://www.stlmag.com/news/Flamingos-and-Phantom-Visitors-Little-Free-Library-Confidential/>

I then built one for our yard (#9578) (Figure 1) out of recycled materials from Resource Boulder and wood from a local Home Depot culled lumber pile. Paint, varnish and stain come free from the Boulder Recycling center. The rules of the game are that the only purchased materials I use are new screws (~ 100 per library), sometimes hinges and lots of waterproof caulk. It takes me ~30 hours to complete a library that includes the scrounging for repurposed materials. When finished, they generally weigh under 70 pounds so that I can take them on United Airlines as baggage.

I give the libraries away and install free on posts set in concrete.



**Figure 1.** Myself and wife Suan Schnell beside our library at our home in 2013.

People going by our library often stop and ask where they could get one. I explain that I build and install them. Soon, I was also getting requests from people who had seen one in a town or had been referred to me by their friends. So, I started building them whenever I found enough reclaimed materials.

Each one is different as I start with an old kitchen cabinet door, cut out the center panel and insert a plastic window, and build the library up from there. Depending on the materials, they may be made of lap siding (my favorite material), shingles from house reroofs or donated wood that people leave in front of my garage.

My third library (Figure 2) was a surprise birthday gift for 90-year-old twin sisters who had been librarians for half a century at the University of Colorado. They have 100's of books that are steadily taken from the library as they live on a popular walking byway.



**Figure 2.** Twin sisters Martha and Mary Campbell, Boulder, Colorado, with their 90<sup>th</sup> birthday gift library.

**Photo by**  
**Suan Schnell.**

I am an atmospheric scientist working for NOAA and have travelled around the world many times with my job (92 countries to date). As such, I have contacts in many locations on Earth. Hearing that I build libraries; colleagues occasionally ask if they could get one? Since I fly so much with United Airlines, I can take 140 pound of luggage free, so it is easy to take a library along.

Libraries are in Canada on a First Peoples reserve, Maskwacis, Alberta (Figure 3); a train museum in Camrose, Alberta; on Mount Fuji, Japan ( Figure 4); an Aboriginal area in Warrnambool, Australia (Figures 5, 6 and 7); Swansea Wales, UK; Gulu, Uganda; South Pole, Antarctica; and about 75 spread around Colorado and Missouri in the U.S.



**Figure 3.** A library I installed on a First Nations Reserve, Maskwacis, Alberta in September 2019. A local retired school teacher is taking care of the library as she has many boxes of children's books to keep it filled.



**Figure 4.** Dr. Yukiko Dokiya, retired Japanese professor, with a Little Free Library being installed at the Mt. Fuji Observatory, at 12,288 feet above sea level near the top of Mount Fuji, Japan, June 2021. I delivered the library to her at an earlier date.



**Figure 5.** A Library I took to Warrnambool, Australia installed into an Aboriginal homeland area.

*On August 20, 2020, I received the following email:*

*“I am a regular visitor to the little library you gave to Warrnambool. I often stop to check what is available or to drop off some books for others to enjoy. There are often toys, games and CDs too.*

*Thank you for your kind gift to Warrnambool. I hope you take much pleasure in knowing that it is still in use and as popular as ever.*

*Murray Bowes, Curator of Collections,  
Warrnambool City Council”*



**Figure 6.** An art book with a painting of a younger Fiona Clark, the woman to my left, a Warrnambool resident. We placed a copy of the book in the library.

**Photo by Susan Schnell.**

09/20/2016



**Figure 7.** A proud Fiona, another local resident and an elderly Aboriginal woman looking at a different art book we had put into the library.

***Photo by Suan Schnell.***

Other libraries of interest is one in a 365-unit manufactured home park in Broomfield, CO habited by residents with many children. The request for the library initiated by a man doing yard work across the road from where I was building a library in our garage. After about an hour, he came over to see what I was doing, probably because my power sawing was just as loud as his leaf blower was. He felt a library would be great for children home schooling in the park because of COVID-19 (see Figure 8).

Another library of interest (Figure 9) is installed in the corner of a retired schoolteacher's garden in Longmont, CO. A friend of hers had seen me working on libraries in my garage and mentioned it to her. She contacted me and I began to build. The first time we met was on installation day. Her home is across the road from a large low-income housing project where most residents' first language is Spanish. She has many children's books in Spanish so I provided a colorful welcome sign and instructions in Spanish and mounted it in the library window.

There are other libraries such as for an English Professor Emeritus who for 20 years selected the words for the annual Scripps National Spelling Bee. On his retirement, he requested a library for his yard so he could offer 100s books to children in his neighborhood.

And schools. They love the libraries. They are at 7 schools. One installation that was extra rewarding is in South St. Louis, MO. The day the library was stocked, children flocked to get books (Figure 10). The children were appreciative of the books that they had chosen and got to take home free.

Another is at a senior's homeowners association that had a party for the installation (Figure 11) and in a neighborhood park with many children living nearby (Figure 12).



**Figure 8.** A little library installed in a manufactured home park in Broomfield, CO. The young girl is doing a dance, as she is so happy that there will be free Spanish picture books in the library within the hour. The other man is Mark Lareau, a friend who helps with The LFL painting and installations.



**Figure 9.** A little library installed in the corner of a woman's garden opposite a low-income housing complex in Longmont, CO, where the residents' main language is Spanish. The docent is a retired schoolteacher with many children's books, some in Spanish.

*Note how we modified her fence to fit the library in.*



**Figure 10.** Children with a book they selected on opening day of a Little Free Library installed at an elementary school yard in South St. Louis, MO. Our daughter Alicia regularly stocks children's books in the library.

***Photo by Alicia Schnell, St. Louis, MO.***



**Figure 11.** Installation day, Corriente Townhomes, Boulder, CO. This unit has exceptionally high adult usage as it serves a large senior citizen population and is on a main traffic avenue.

***Photo by Suan Schnell.***





**Figure 12.** This young girl asked her mother if she could have a Little Library? Her mother contacted me and the daughter selected this library. We installed it at the edge of a community park in Lafayette, CO, a town 15 miles east of Boulder. Young families surround the park. It is well used with a high turnover of children's books.

During the COVID shutdown, I converted a small refrigerator into a Little Free Pantry (LFP) and mounted in our front yard (Figure 13). After our initial stocking of the pantry, anonymous people have kept it well stocked.



**Figure 13.** A small, non-working refrigerator I converted into a Little Free Pantry to offer food to people in need due to fallout from the COVID pandemic. I added a roof to keep the door from leaking. It is in our front yard beside a busy sidewalk leading to a park.

After the pantry has served its purpose, it will repurposed as a Little Free Library stocked with books instead of canned and dry food.

## Little Library at the South Pole, Antarctica.

In my career, I have travelled to the South Pole twice to work at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Atmospheric Research Observatory (ARO). NOAA maintains two staff at the ARO conducting atmospheric measurements related to climate altering greenhouse gases and the Ozone Hole. The staff work at the ARO but sleep and eat at a central support facility about ¼ mile away. They walk between the ARO and main building daily in all weather conditions

The South Pole station sits on an ice layer >9,000 ft. thick. There is no outdoor vegetation or animal life for many hundreds of miles. One gets to the pole in ski equipped aircraft flying from McMurdo station on the Antarctic coast. Aircraft can only land at the South Pole for about 3 months during Antarctic summer. Other times, it is too cold for aircraft hydraulic landing systems to operate.

The ARO staff go to the South Pole during the Antarctic summer where the sun shines 24 hours a day. In Antarctic winter, there is no sunlight for 6 months. Temperatures can reach -150°F but are more commonly around -80°F to -100°F. The staff leave after their one-year stint literally at “the end of the Earth”.

The Little Free Library shipped to the South Pole as a protective container for delicate items. Views of the library outdoors on a South Pole summer day are in Figures 14 through 17. The library is usually inside the ARO where it holds novels, VCR tapes of scary movies, science fiction books, some equipment manuals and an eclectic range of books. Books with photos of colorful trees, warm deserts, water, beaches, wheat fields, animals etc. are popular at the South Pole. Everything else is white for hundreds of miles in all directions.



**Figure 14.** Little Free Library at the South Pole, November 2020. It normally is inside the (ARO), seen in Figures 15 and 16, as wind, cold and snow would destroy it if left outdoors.  
**Photo by Yuya Makino, Ice Cube Project**



**Figure 15.** The Atmospheric Research Observatory (ARO) in summer at the South Pole, Antarctica, in which the library is located and two NOAA staff work. *Photo by Patrick Cullis, Boulder*



**Figure 16.** The ARO in winter with stars, aurora and a laser beam shooting skyward to measure particles in the atmosphere. Note, in this time-lapse photo how the Earth rotates around the South Pole axis. *Photo by Patrick Cullis, Boulder*



**Figure 17.** Library beside the pole marking the location of the South Pole. The flags represent some of the different nations that have signed the Antarctic treaty. *Photo by Yuya Makino, Ice Cube Project*



**Figure 18.** Libraries awaiting delivery to locations in Canada (2), California (1) and 6 across northern Colorado (7 in photo and 2 under construction).

In March- June, 2021 we installed ten LFLs at homes in Longmont, Louisville, Gunbarrel and Boulder, one at the Intercambio “English as a Second Language” school, and one at the High Peaks Elementary School, Boulder.

In Figures 19 and 22 are photos of some of these installations. Note that the size and shape of each LFL is based on the cabinet door the LFL starts with. Color is determined by the repurposed paint available from the Boulder Recycle Center.



Figure 19. Some of the libraries installed March-June, 2021.



**Figure 20.** LFLs installed earlier in the Boulder County, CO area.



**Figure 21.**

An extra-large LFL was installed at the Math and Science Leadership Academy Denver, where 80% of the student body has Spanish as their first language.



**Figure 22.** The LFLs differ as each is built around a recycled kitchen cabinet door and if there is recycled plastic sheets available, an extra viewing window is added at the top.



## LFL in Acholinyk Village, Gula District, Northern Uganda, June 2021.

A LFL was constructed of light materials and glue (instead of metal screws) then disassembled and packed small to fit into a suitcase and carried to Uganda by Sue Nelson, Berthoud, CO, founder of the “Lift UP Uganda” charity. She also took along 200 pounds of children’s books collected in the Boulder area. Due to COVID restrictions enacted the day the LFL arrived, children at the elementary school were sent back to their villages and may not return until late August.



**Figure 23.** (Upper) Ugandan LFL under construction held together with glue instead of heavier screws.

(Lower photo) Three teachers at the Acholinyk Village elementary school, Uganda along with Sue Nelson who transported the LFL and escorted 200 pounds of books to Uganda collected around Boulder, CO, June 2021.



**Material of possible interest from the original library installation in our daughter Alicia's front yard that led to the present "Constellation" of LFLs. This was one of the first "Little Free Libraries" in St Louis.**

**1) Re: St Louis "Kick Ass Award" to Alicia Schnell and Alan Shutko**

**From:** ann haubrich ([annhaubrich@gmail.com](mailto:annhaubrich@gmail.com))  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2013 12:07 AM  
**To:** Schnell, Alicia  
**Subject:** Little Free Library

**Dear Alicia,**

*Please excuse me for email stalking you and your Little Free Library--I drive by the library at least once a week and several times have left and/or taken a book or 2. Really appreciate what you and Mr. Shutko do.*

*I am writing to you because I am part of a small group of people, who for 10 years this year, have presented the St. Louis Kick Ass Awards to unsung or under-appreciated people or entities (small businesses, nonprofit agencies) that make St. Louis a great community.*

*With your permission, I would like to nominate the Little Free Library of Washington Boulevard in the CWE of St. Louis for a 2013 Kick Ass Award. Unfortunately, there's no monetary award but there is a gathering of fine St. Louis minds and community-oriented people-- and awardees take home a lovely trophy.*

*To prove this is a legitimate enterprise, here's a link to our Kick Ass website:*  
<http://kickassawardsstl.wordpress.com/>

*This year's awards will be held on Thursday, October 24, 2013, 7:00 pm at The Heavy Anchor, located on Gravois in South City.*

*If you are open to receiving a Kick Ass Award and available the night of the awards ceremony, please let me know.*

*Please feel free to contact me with questions.  
And thanks again for your Little Free Library.*

**Ann Haubrich**

*P.S. Just so you know I'm on the up & up, here's a little bit of my personal cred: I am the Managing Director of Prison Performing Arts ([www.PrisonPerformingArts.org](http://www.PrisonPerformingArts.org)) and have hosted a literary program on KDHX for more than 20 years (<http://kdhx.org/play/radio-shows/literature-for-the-halibut>).*

## 2) Citation for the “Kick Ass Award

*Alicia Schnell and Alan Shutko love books and believe books build community. With the help of Alicia’s dad, the couple and their toddler son built and steward the city’s first Little Free Library in front of their home on Washington Boulevard, at the edge of the Central West End and Gaslight Square. Based on the concept “take a book, return a book”, a little free library is bigger than a breadbox and perhaps more fun than a bookmobile. This one has 2 shelves, accommodating about 30 to 40 books and is stocked with just about any book imaginable, from how-to-tomes to literature (high and low!), from children’s books to history books and everything in-between (would you believe a book about communicating with your pets from beyond the grave?). Thanks to their LFL, Alicia and Alan promote literacy, delight passersby, and add charm and whimsy to their beautiful street. See trophy in Figure 19.*



Figure 24. Kick Ass Award Trophy.

### 3) Invitation to the Mayor of St. Louis Sustainability Conference resulting from someone seeing the Little Free Library while driving by Alicia Schnell’s LFL, one of the first in St. Louis, MO.

From: "Werner, Catherine" <[werner@stlouis-mo.gov](mailto:werner@stlouis-mo.gov)>  
Subject: Mayor's Sustainability Summit presentation request  
Date: October 10, 2013 at 1:46:09 PM CDT  
To: [ats@acm.org](mailto:ats@acm.org)  
Cc: Miriam Keller <[Miriam.L.Keller@gmail.com](mailto:Miriam.L.Keller@gmail.com)>

Dear Alan and Alicia,

I am writing to invite you to present at the upcoming *Mayor's Sustainability Summit III: implement*. I apologize for contacting you out of the blue, but we noticed your mini-library photo and email address on the mini-library website. I think this is a terrific project that fits in nicely with the City's attempt to promote triple bottom line sustainability at the neighborhood scale. If you are

not familiar with our sustainability initiatives, I would be happy to share more (and you can learn more by going to the website in my email signature block).

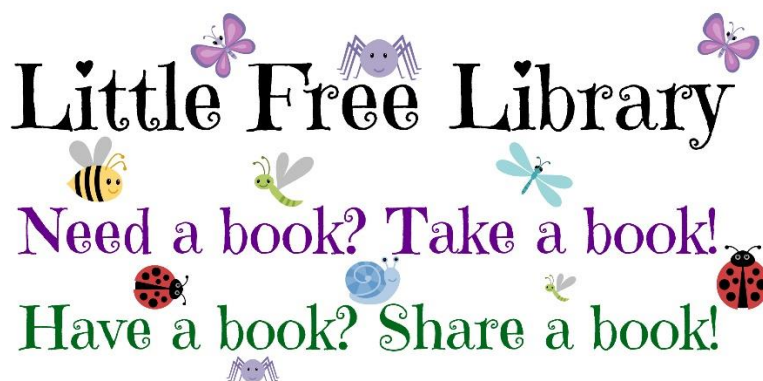
*At any rate, on November 9th we will be focusing on implementation of sustainability projects at the neighborhood level. We are putting together several Mini-Workshops that will take place during this day of the Summit. These Mini-Workshops will be a very important part of the day, as they will give community members the specific and/or hands-on knowledge and tools they need to successfully implement projects in their neighborhoods. Each session will be 45 minutes, including a 30 minute presentation and 15 minutes for Q&A. I was thinking you might go over the specific details of how to construct a mini-library, and how you select and manage the books that you share in your neighborhood. If you are willing, I might even purchase a kit for you to use during the demonstration. Just as long as the mini library winds up on my front yard :-)*

More Details: Date: November 9th, 2013.

Presentation Time: 2:00pm (to be confirmed)

- **Location:** Washington University's Danforth Campus (exact room locations to be confirmed)
- **Resource Sheet:** Since the presentation time is limited and we would like attendees to leave with the tools they need to get started, we will also be asking each presenter to prepare a leave-behind sheet that provides information on key steps and other valuable resources. We will provide all presenters with a template for this resource sheet, and need your leave behind resource sheet by October 24th.
- **PowerPoint:** All of the presentation rooms will be AV-equipped, and you are more than welcome to use a PowerPoint for your presentation. We will also have an opportunity to share the PowerPoint slides you prepare with

Neighborhood Day. She will be coordinating the details and logistics. Many thanks for the consideration! All best, Catherine



**Figure 25.** Label put into the window of each LFL.

