

Librarian brings Disney royalty, heroes to life for reading program

By Adam Rollins
STAFF WRITER

For a number of weeks now, children in Wright City and beyond have been delighted to visit the Wright City library's Facebook page on Wednesdays and find Snow White, Elsa, Rapunzel, or even Captain Marvel reading for them and interacting with them live over the internet.

How did these movie heroines emerge from the screen to grace the Wright City Scenic Regional Library? They're the work of the library's children's programmer, Kayleigh Baryo, who has turned her fondness for costumes and cosplay into a way to keep kids engaged while they can't interact in person. "Once we shut down



STORY TIME WITH CINDERELLA — Children's programmer Kayleigh Baryo brings stories to children each week in the guise of various Disney or superhero characters. She connects from the Wright City library to young viewers over Facebook Live. Adam Rollins photo.

"They all have different personalities. So learning. If they know their favorite princess request for kids who need birthday wishes

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"Once we shut down for COVID, we had our summer reading program we were still trying to get people to participate in (virtually)," Baryo explained. "Our summer reading program was fairy tale themed, so I thought it would be perfect to bring princesses into it."

Baryo has costumes to bring about 10 characters to life, all of which are from her personal collection. She said parents and kids have started checking in on which princess will read each week and are making requests.

"I have noticed I get more views when I am a princess than when I'm myself," Baryo acknowledged with a laugh. "But that's fine, because if I'm getting more kids watching, then that's awesome."

But Baryo doesn't just dress up as the characters. The children watching expect her to be the characters, even the kids who aren't fooled by the costumes.

Once personalities. So someone like Rapunzel is going to be very upbeat and chipper ... and someone like Snow White or Cinderella, the more classic princesses, although they're happy, they're not hyper," Baryo commented. "The older kids still definitely know it's me, but they get into it and they think it's really fun."

Library branch manager Renny McBride said it's a delight to see Baryo share her love of getting into character with children. Even before the pandemic, she would sometimes dress as a princess for special programs, McBride said.

"Kayleigh would walk by, and little girls would be like, 'It's Snow White!' and be so excited to see her. It's like Disney World sometimes," McBride elaborated.

She said having the kids get enthusiastic about movie characters is a great way to interest them in programs that encourage reading and

their favorite princess or female superhero enjoys reading, the kids will, too.

That extra interest is especially important when the library can't host group activities in person, and has to rely on social media outreach, McBride said.

"I think it's really fun to see the comments and feedback on social media," she added. "(Baryo) is able to say hi to the parents and kids, and that interaction gives a sense of community even when people aren't able to be here in person."

Outside of the library programs, Baryo also spends her personal time sending princess video messages through her own Facebook page, Virtual Castle. She sends the messages on

need birthday wishes or a pick-me-up when they're down.

"I always enjoyed bringing happiness and magic to kids, which is why I wanted to become a children's programmer," Baryo said. "It just makes me really happy to get to see the kids' faces when they get to meet their favorite person."

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