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Valley Reads to explore 'wildness' in the St. Croix Valley

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It's going to get "wild" in the St. Croix Valley this spring.

Valley Reads, the St. Croix Valley annual community reading program, has selected "wildness" as its 2009 theme.

Books selected for community reading are "Ordinary Wolves," by Seth Kantner, "My Side of the Mountain," by Jean Craighead George, and "Antler Bear Canoe," by Betsy Brown.

A variety of events are scheduled for the annual program, set for April 13 through 26, including two author visits, said Jessica Pack, executive director of ArtReach Alliance, one of the partners for the annual event.

Community members can read the same book, and then discuss the themes in a number of community venues, she said. Each year an adult book, a teen book and a children's book has been part of the program. The overriding feeling should be "come to book club with us," Pack said.

Each year, the program has encompassed more programs, venues and artistic media, Pack said. This year, visual arts are part of Valley Reads. "Antler Bear Canoe" author Brown, of Grand Marais, is a woodcut artist, and one of the programs will be an introduction to woodcut printmaking at The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, Wis. Kantner, of northern Alaska, is also a photographer, and his photos will be exhibited as part of the program.

The theme came from discussions about what binds the St. Croix Valley, Pack said. "We wanted to talk about where we live and where we are," she said. "We started talking about our environment and what makes this area unique." Each conversation boiled down to "wild," and then the books were chosen.

"Ordinary Wolves" is a first novel by the author about growing up in a remote area of Alaskan wilderness. Kanter also has a nonfiction book to be released in April, "Shopping for Porcupine."

"My Side of the Mountain," first published in 1959, is familiar to many adults as a book they read as children or teens, about a boy who chooses to leave home and live on his own in the Catskill Mountains.

"Antler Bear Canoe" is an alphabet book that introduces children to the cyclical rhythms of life in the north.

Brown, author of the children's book, will be the first author to attend. She will visit Houlton, Wis., before taking part in story time at Bayport Public Library. She will also entertain visits by school groups and an exhibit and reception at the Stillwater Public Library on April 14.

Seth Kantner will appear at both St. Croix Preparatory Academy and Stillwater Area High School with exhibits of his photography, a program that will be cablecast to the junior high schools.

Kantner will appear at Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Stillwater April 23, for both a book discussion and a showing of his slides.

Inter-generational discussions are key to Valley Reads, Pack said, designed to bring people together, such as discussions by Lily Lake Elementary School students with visitors to the Stillwater Senior Center. In addition, "Wildness at Boutwells" is planned for April 18, which will include falconing demonstrations, a puppetry performance, a book discussion of "My Side of the Mountain" and a reception.

To accommodate more school children, money is available to transport school children to events, Pack said.

It's all part of being inclusive, and allowing all segments of the community to be a part of the discussion, she said.

Books may be purchased at Valley Bookseller is downtown Stillwater, and Pack recommends that people get reading now so they will be ready for next month's discussions.

Besides ArtReach Alliance, Valley Reads partners are Bayport Public Library, Stillwater Public Library, Washington County Library, Stillwater Area Public Schools Community Education, Boutwells Landing, Valley Bookseller, Hudson Area Joint Library, Hudson School District, The Phipps Center for the Arts, St. Croix Valley YMCA and Back to Books.

New this year is the River Falls Public Library.

A complete list of events and locations will be on the ArtReach Web site at www.valleyreads.org.