Librarian’s class donates hundreds of children’s books

First-year students at CSUB are collecting donated children’s books to create a children’s library at the Alliance Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault.
First-Year Experience and Outreach Librarian Sarah Fay Philips said she is proud to have been working with this enthusiastic and inspired group of students who are leading the book drive as part of their participation in a learning community on homelessness during their first year at CSUB.

Students in the fall enrolled in CSUB 101 as a required course to introduce them to the university. Philips has taught a section for the past 3 years, but this was the first year that she taught the full year learning community. A select group of...

Paradise Built in Hell
Review by Sarah Fay Philips

The risk of living through a serious earthquake is a reality that most of us have come to terms with as residents of Bakersfield. Like most people I have an underlying fear that if the big one came, or the dam broke, I would be depending on my strength and cunning to protect my family from marauding mobs. It was inspiring to read Rebecca Solnit’s accounts of catastrophes in “A Paradise Build in Hell” where the best of human nature emerges after a disaster and individuals set aside personal gain to offer aid to fellow residents. Solnit takes us to the site of many disasters, both historic and contemporary and argues that the community provides the support that helps survivors of a di-

Walter’s Readers: Library Book Club

This year, librarians Sandra Bozarth and Sarah Fay Philips began a book club to connect campus and community readers in the library.

The book club started in January reading “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,” a text with accessible science writing dealing with the ethical issues of race and class in medical research. This selection during Winter Quarter 2012 was supported by a partnership with the Black Student Union which sponsored events on campus for Black History Month.

For Spring Quarter 2012, Bozarth and Philips are hosting a book discussions on “A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disasters” in partnership with the...
Novel about the afterlife slated for reading, discussion

Dr. Stafford Betty has spent decades involved in controversial research, trying to shed light on the ultimate existential question: What happens when we die? On May 16 at 3 p.m., Professor Betty will do a short reading from his recently published novel, *The Imprisoned Splendor*, which is set in the afterlife, and then follow it up with a look at the evidence for his position on life after death.

“It’s rather amazing that there actually is evidence, and it’s surprisingly solid,” he says. “It’s less clear what the afterlife is like, but there are many intriguing hints, and generalities about its nature are beginning to emerge. We’ll be looking at these.”

Professor Betty titles the talk “Afterlife: Its Laws, Landscapes, Cultures, and Inhabitants.” It will feature an 8-minute YouTube video about this material made with the help of Mohammed Khan, a CSUB student.

Originally a scholar of Asian philosophy and religion, Betty began to believe that the ultimate questions of existence weren’t being addressed in a meaningful way within academia. Dr. Betty’s extensive reading in the narratives of trance mediums — who claim an ability to channel spirits of the dead from the afterlife — convinced him and other scholars that great philosophical answers lie in these alternative materials. He feels that the “dead” need to be heard from.

“It is a tragedy that an area of studies so filled with hope for all of us is commonly snubbed by leading intellectuals and trend setters, who refuse to even look at the evidence,” Betty said. “But the materialism they represent is coming under fire from a new cadre of trend setters.”

The novel centers around Kiran, a philosophy professor who teaches at a prestigious university in California. When Kiran dies in a plane crash in his native India, he finds himself thrust into an afterlife he was certain did not exist. It is at this point in the novel, in this strange afterworld, that the reader joins Kiran in an examination of his life. Kiran is forced to face the dark and selfish nature of his relationships with others and to make amends for the choices he made. The novel argues that our choices on earth matter and that death is not the black hole of nothingness that many fear, but an awakening into a complex world where

Service (continued from page 1)

students elect to register for CSUB 103 to participate in the learning community with readings, discussions, and presentations on homelessness and by volunteering at the local homeless shelter during winter quarter. Students were motivated and inspired by this high-impact learning experience and most have committed to additional service to the community.

The official service learning portion of the learning community is being completed this quarter with the students in Philips’ section choosing to create a children’s library at the Alliance Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault. Donations of books are accepted at the Bakersfield Homeless Shelter for their children’s library.

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saster, making this book a perfect community read for the greater Bakersfield area.

Solnit argues that much of the fear that people have about the unknown that would follow a natural disaster has been fostered by sensationalized media accounts. When the news repeats video of tragedy and violence, it is assumed to be much more common than it is. Repeated studies have shown that panic after a disaster is much more rare and that assistance to others and calm behavior is actually the norm. Unfortunately the media focuses on fear, with taped loops vacillating between the most dramatized shots of destruction and heroic footage of firefighters saving the helpless. This encourages fear among average people and dependency on trained professionals. This book powerfully encourages us to reexamine heroism and emergency services.

Firefighters, police, EMTs and other professionals are infrequently the first people to respond to an emergency. Your neighbors are who will save you during times of trouble, those who you have never talked to and those who babysat you as a child, are likely the first to help you after a catastrophe. When social structures are destroyed what is created is “improvised, collaborative, cooperative and local society” where ordinary people are heroes who save lives.

Another element of the disinformation regarding disasters comes from what is described by sociologist Kathleen Tierney as elite panic: “Fear of social disorder; fear of poor, minorities and immigrants; obsession with looting and property crime; willingness to resort to deadly force; and actions taken on the basis of rumor.” This issue is addressed in the book because the assumption that people will act out and increase the anarchy is the operating principle for many government decisions during disasters from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake to Hurricane Katrina.

Many questions arise while reading “A Paradise Built in Hell” that will be interesting to discuss. This book helps the reader recognize the communities that exist around us, even when ordinarily they may not seem very strong, because the great potential for community uplift and unprompted support exist in our own neighborhoods. Reading this book will make you question how you think about disasters, big and small, and any assumption you have about how people behave after a catastrophe will be challenged.
**Troup’s talk packs Reading Room**

A discussion and lecture on the history and influence of the King James Bible drew a capacity crowd to the Dezember Reading Room on April 18.

“Medievalists don't normally get much of a crowd when they speak, so this is a big surprise. I’m not used to speaking to so many people. I hope someone will take a lot of pictures,” quipped Dr. Andy Troup.

Dr. Troup teaches medieval literature at CSUB. He has been the instructor for the CSUB “Bible as Literature” course since 1997. The class focuses on the King James Version as a literary document, rather than as a sacred text.

The lecture drew a diverse mix of students, staff, faculty, and community members.

Dr. Troup’s lecture was the fifth Walter Presents event of the school year. The final event, a talk by Dr. Stafford Betty, will be on May 16. Previous events have included a Holocaust panel exhibition associated with the Museum of Tolerance, a civil liberties exhibition provided by the California Council for the Humanities, a talk by author, journalist, and well-known civil liberties activist Elaine Elinson, and a lecture by Dr. Thomas Meyer about his family’s experiences under the Nazi regime in Germany. The library is currently arranging events for the Walter Presents series during the 2012-13 school year.

**Novel** (continued from page 2)

we can continue to evolve and grow.

Dr. Betty earned his Ph.D. at Fordham University, is a Vietnam veteran, and came to CSUB as a religious studies professor shortly after the university was founded. Even those who disagree with him or find his area of study eccentric will be engaged by the questions his research and writing raises.

Dr. Betty’s reading is part of the Walter Presents series, which brings exhibitions, lectures, readings, performances, and presentations to the Walter Stiern Library at no cost. All events are open to the public.

**Readers** (continued from page 1)

Kern County Library and the “California Reads: Searching for Democracy Grant.”

This book explores five catastrophes from the past century and the power of every-day people in response to disaster. (See review) The community read is a perfect launching point for discussions about democracy in disaster but also in our daily life.

The book club meets every other Thursday in the Research Corner and has been joined by CSUB students, faculty, staff and community members.


**Writer** (continued from page 1)

small stipend. In exchange, the writer will teach a four-session creative writing workshop in the Dezember Reading Room. The class is open to the community through Extended University.

Dr. Richard Collins volunteered to launch the program for the library this summer. Dr. Collins is an English professor and Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities. He is also a widely published writer and the former editor a literary journal.

“Richard’s generous offer to help us get the program up and running without seeking a stipend is a huge help. We are very grateful for his support,” said Curt Asher, Interim Dean of the Library. “We hope that its initial success will help us attract donations to get our writer-in-residence program off the ground.”

Asher said that the workshop will be a very valuable addition to the community and the university.

“There are a lot of writers and would-be writers out there. The workshop is a great opportunity to give new or unpublished writers a chance to learn from those who are experienced in the craft,” Asher said.
To become a member of Stiern Associates, go to www.csub.edu/library and select the “donate” link at the bottom of the page.