

Librarian suggests turning the page on longtime reading club winner

Tyler Weaver calls himself “the king of the reading club” at Hudson Falls Public Library. But now it seems Hudson Falls Public Library Director Marie Gandron wants to end his reign and have him dethroned.

The 9-year-old boy, who will be starting fifth grade next month, won the six-week-long “Dig into Reading” event by completing 63 books from June 24 to Aug. 3, averaging more than 10 a week.

He has consistently been the top reader since kindergarten, devouring a total of 373 books over the five contests, according to his mother, Katie.

“It feels great,” said Tyler, an intermediate scholar student at Hudson Falls School. “I think that was actually a record-breaking streak.”

His younger brother, Jonathan, 7, won second place two years in a row now, completing more than 40 books this time.

Prizes were also awarded for the top reader in the kindergarten division, best rock people creations and best coloring entries.

Katie said she is “extremely proud” of her sons’ accomplishments, especially Tyler for having held his title for this long.

“I’ve told them God makes all of us different. There are some things that are hard and some that are easy, but they should excel at what they enjoy doing and Tyler just loves to read,” she said. “Everybody he tells, he gets high-fives. Everybody’s so proud of him.”

Everybody, it seems, but Gandron, who was surprised to learn Katie notified a Post-Star reporter about her son being a longtime winner. During a phone call Tuesday to Gandron, the library director said Tyler “hogs” the contest every year and he should “step aside.”

“Other kids quit because they can’t keep up,” Gandron said.

Gandron further told the reporter she planned to change the rules of the contest so that instead of giving prizes to the children who read the most books, she would draw names out of a hat and declare winners that way. She said she can’t now because Katie has come forward to the newspaper.

Gandron said she has an “attitude” about the contest because several years ago a little girl came in claiming she had read more than 200 books. Her mother backed her up, but it was discovered the girl was lying.

“That’s when we stopped (taking a child’s and parent’s word) because she wasn’t (reading the books),” Gandron said.

Gandron said the rules require each child to read books suitable to his or her grade level or higher. When the book is returned to the library, the child pulls a random slip of paper out of a jar and a library aide poses questions to verify whether he actually knows the content.

Queries include identifying the child’s favorite character or asking the reader what part of the book he would change and why.

Gandron said “as far as (she) knows” Tyler has fulfilled the requirements because he was able to answer everything related to the stories. His prizes, in separate years, included an atlas, T-shirt, water bottle and certificates of achievement.

“They’re really not any grand things. I think he just likes to be the top reader,” Katie said.

Lita Casey, an aide at the library for 28 years, said she is usually the person who asks the questions to determine whether the children have done the reading. She keeps track of the number of books for each student and submits it to Gandron.

Casey said she enjoys working with all the kids at the library and doesn’t want her job to be in jeopardy, but she feels Gandron’s plan to change the rules of the contest are “ridiculous.”

Casey said everyone in the club is on a level playing field because all begin and end the same day and all have the opportunity to read as many books as they wish.

“We’re not going to see some of these kids until next year, and you’re worried about them (being treated equally), and then, you’ve got two kids who come in every week taking books out?” she said.

Casey said she called library board member Michael Herman to complain.

“My feeling is you work, you get it. That’s just the way it is in anything. My granddaughter started working on track in grade school and ended up being a national champ. Should she have backed off and said, ‘No, somebody else should win?’ I told her (Gandron), but she said it’s not a contest, it’s the reading club and everybody should get a chance,” Casey said.

Casey said some of the children read only the minimum of 10 books so they can receive an invitation to the party at the end of the program.

This year, she made “six or seven” follow-up phone calls a week before the contest ended to prompt kids to finish their books.

Casey established a special relationship with the Weaver boys, who call her “Gram,” because they are frequent visitors to the library. She said between the two brothers, they have borrowed 1,000 books in the past few years.

As a testament to Tyler’s love of reading, Casey said that a few years ago, the summer theme centered on regions of the United States. Kids were supposed to read a book on each section of the country. A few children dropped out of the program because they didn’t like the subject matter, Casey said, but Tyler read at least one book on each of the 50 states.

“It was just something he wanted to do. He read them and told me about them. He wrote a synopsis and his mother typed it up,” she said.

Tyler said this uproar has made him “a little bit angry.”

“If they end up where a librarian would pick out a name from a hat ... she might only read one slip and then (that child) would be picked out. He didn’t put enough effort in and he won. It’s not fair,” he said. “How would it even be a contest if you just picked a name out of a hat?”

Katie said if Gandron takes an alternate approach to the contest next year, neither of her sons will participate and they’ll head to Crandall Public Library in Glens Falls.

“I don’t see the downside of Tyler winning five years in a row. I think people should be proud of him, especially a library director,” she said.