

Quiet little library puts folks first

■ Inside the Aripeka Public Library, you'll find friendly volunteers and a philosophy that has captured the hearts of a community.

By KIM GILMORE
Times Correspondent

ARIPEKA — Nestled in scrub oaks off the beaten path in Aripeka is a jewel of information that illustrates how determination and belief in oneself can lead to success.

Since 1959, the Aripeka Public Library has housed books, provided a meeting place and served as a source of inspiration in this small coastal community on the Hernando-Pasco county line.

While other public libraries battle for tax dollars and grant money, the Aripeka library has survived for 35 years without any such assistance. Its major source of income is an annual flea market, which takes place this weekend.

You won't find a fancy computer check-out system — they still use cards — or expensive collections at the library. In fact, all of the books were donated. The only books ever purchased were a set of encyclopedias that cost \$500.

But residents do find friendly smiles on the faces of the volunteers and fudge and apples waiting on the tables when they visit the library.

The library's longevity and independence are a testament to the involvement of local residents, and secretary Lila Bowman.

"I think Aripeka has been different in that, regardless of whether a person had the time or the energy to come to the library, whether or not they could even see to read. When it came time to pay dues, they coughed up two bucks so that they could support us," Bowman said. "I don't think you can find that in many places."

Bowman said the modest block building at 18834 Rosemary Road originally housed a first aid station. In the late 1950s, resident George Lowenstein bought the building for about \$800 and started the library.

Even then, residents pitched in, holding fish fries and fund-raisers to cover costs, said Bowman. Eventually, the mortgage

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was paid off.

As a result, the library is now able to operate on a budget of \$200 to \$300 a year, from which the volunteer board of directors pays the insurance, electricity and lawn maintenance. All other expenses are covered by donations and volunteers.

For example, as a part of their membership, children are asked to help check in books and clean. In return, they are allowed to use the library as a gathering place with friends after school. In addition, volunteers reward them with parties.

This year's flea market will take place from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the Aripeka Community Club, 1393 Osoway Blvd. The need to raise money is great, Bowman said, but donations are down because of the coastal flood last March.

She said the library lost about 1,000 books in the flood that the directors are trying to replace. However, atop her wish list is a space heater. "Ours got ruined in the flood," Bowman said.

In addition, the library needs books, furniture, additional volunteers and cash donations.

Anyone wanting to donate items for the flea market, or who would like to make other donations, can call Bowman at 597-3480. Items for the flea market also may be dropped off at the community club.

Aripeka tale resumes to aid library

■ The telling of Lila Bowman's mystery was interrupted by the 1993 no-name storm. Now the rest of the story will be sold at a fund-raiser.

By KIM GILMORE
Times Staff Writer

ARIPEKA — When the story left off, Daelee Carroll, who took a year off from teaching to rethink her life, was all in a tizzy.

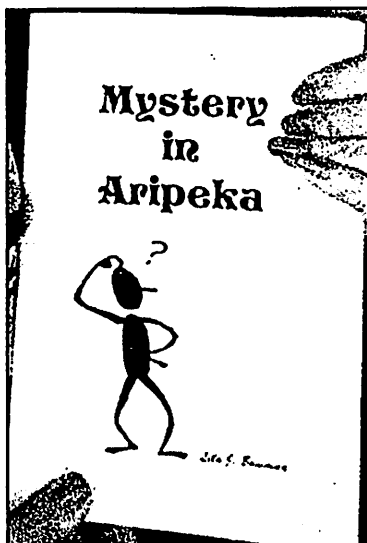
While canoeing in Hammock Creek near Aripeka, Daelee overheard some men arranging a drug exchange. She also found a portion of a treasure map floating in the water showing where a reward was buried.

Fearful, Daelee telephoned her friend Terry and asked her to visit for a while. Then she called the sheriff.

"It certainly sounds like you have hit upon a real mystery, Miss Carroll," the sheriff told Daelee.

The same could be said of Hernando and Pasco residents who started reading Lila Bowman's short story, *Mystery in Aripeka*.

The story, which ran as a serial for a short time in the Aripeka Public Library newsletter, was interrupted by the no-



Bowman will sell her short story at a flea market Saturday and Sunday.

name storm in March 1993. Bowman said the remaining chapters were never published because the newsletter was discontinued.

"Everybody was waiting for the next issue, waiting for what was going to happen," she said.

The manuscript, which had been

stored under a bed in Bowman's waterfront home in Aripeka, was damaged badly in the storm.

"It was all soaked and floating," said Bowman, 54, who microwaved the pages and then set them aside.

For four years, readers have been left in the lurch, wondering what happened to young Daelee and how the mystery unfolded.

"We were all piqued and preoccupied," said Carl Norfleet, who read the opening installments of Bowman's story. "So what happened?"

No need to wonder anymore.

At the suggestion of her husband, Bowman plans to peddle copies of her 48-page short story to help raise money for the struggling Aripeka library.

Copies will be for sale at the library's annual fund-raising flea market from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the library, 18834 Rosemary Road. Bowman had not decided on the cost, but said the story probably would sell for \$3 or \$3.50.

The story also will be for sale at several Aripeka businesses.

"We're not trying to get rich on this deal," said Bowman, who hopes story sales will generate a portion of the \$600 the library needs to stay afloat. "It's a very historical place, and I would hate

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to see it go under."

Established in the late 1950s, the Aripeka library has survived more than 38 years without any tax dollars or grant money. Except for a set of encyclopedias, all of the books in the library were donated.

But the library has not fared well since the no-name storm and might have to close if more money is not raised. About 1,000 books were destroyed in the 1993 flood and have yet to be replaced. Also, hours have been reduced to the point that the library is open only from 2 to 4 p.m. Wednesdays.

Volunteers are counting on

proceeds from the flea market to buy new books and keep the library open. The event has long been the library's major source of income.

Mystery in Aripeka may help change that.

Bowman began writing the short story in 1990 as a hobby, and it took nearly a year to complete. It wasn't until later that she saw it as a way to expand the newsletter's circulation.

"I thought it would get more people interested in reading the newsletter," she said.

It did.

"We all had local conversations about it," said Norfleet, who lives a stone's throw from the library. "There was a lot of literary license, because (Bowman's) a romantic anyway."

Bowman said people were always waiting for the next installment, "so that kept me going."

People were always stopping her, she said, to ask her how the mystery unfolded.

The story, which is set in familiar surroundings, consists of a series of not-so-subtle clues that lead to a surprise discovery.

"There's a little romance in it, too," said Bowman's husband, Paul, 82. "I think she's setting herself up for a sequel."

The Bowmans said they used their own money to publish the short story and relied on the services of Aripeka resident John O'Connor, who edited, typeset and designed the story's cover for free.

"We couldn't have done it

without him," Mrs. Bowman said.

After the flood, Mrs. Bowman said, she and her husband sold their 10-year home in Aripeka and moved to the Heather, on U.S. 19 north of Weeki Wachee.

Still, she wants to see the Aripeka library thrive.

"We loved Aripeka, which is why we remained involved in the library," she said.

Bowman said she and other volunteers are determined to help save the tiny library and hope to have it declared a historic site.

In addition to offering books for the public, she said, the volunteers gather there each week to share home-baked goodies.

"We have a lot of fun there," she said.

Short story brings acclaim for author, money for library

By KIM GILMORE
Times Staff Writer

ARIPEKA — Lila Bowman is, in her own right, a bestselling author. And she is learning firsthand that loss of anonymity is the price of fame.

Since her 48-page short story, "Mystery in Aripeka," went on sale last weekend, Bowman has amassed a loyal following, and she is constantly being recognized in public places: the landfill, the doctor's office, the beauty salon, and the annual fund-raising flea market at the Aripeka Public Library.

"She had 'em lined up there, and they all wanted her autograph," boasted Paul Bowman, Lila's husband.

Bowman relished her celebrity status at the annual fund-raiser Saturday and Sunday in Aripeka, where she sold nearly 175 copies of her story and helped raise \$1,113 for the library. About \$600 was needed to assure that the library could pay its bills and remain open.

In the past, volunteers at the library, which relies solely on donations and fund raising, have raised an average of \$400 at the flea sale.

"It was my 48 hours of fame," said Bowman, who added that the story's sales surpassed her wildest dreams. She continues to receive requests for it.

Copies are for sale for \$3.50 at Nor-

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fleet's Fish Camp on Osowaw Boulevard in Aripeka.

The story, which ran as a serial for a short time in the Aripeka library's newsletter, was interrupted and the manuscript damaged by the no-name storm in March 1993. Bowman said the remaining chapters were never published because the newsletter was discontinued.

Through the years, readers continued to ask Bowman how the story unfolded. Mr. Bowman suggested that his wife sell copies of the final

version to help raise money for the library.

So far, the story has been a big hit.

"To have people say they really like it, that's the best thing," Bowman said.

What's more, Bowman's generosity spawned an outpouring of community support for the library. Dozens of people have donated money and books. Some have volunteered their time to help keep the library open.

"Also we had a few people join the library who wouldn't normally have joined," she said.

Bowman said some proceeds from

the flea market and story sales will help pay for repairs to the library. The roof is leaking, and the carpet needs to be shampooed, she said.

"The overhang is rotted out, and we need to get that fixed," Mr. Bowman said.

Meanwhile, Bowman is contemplating a sequel, a romantic mystery with an uncertain title.

"It would probably be something in Aripeka," she said. "If this thing would take off, we'd like to get an extra room built on the library (for storage).

"It's the best thing that's happened to the library in a long time."