

Beers and books – a novel way to get people to read (26, 01, 13)

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Niagara on the Lake's Public Library has certainly placed "pub" in the word "public," producing a partnership (book club) worthy of any bibliophile and sipper of suds. Imagine discussing Joyce, Yeats, Shaw, Wilde and Swift at the Irish Pub. Brendan Behan is rolling over in his grave with his pickled liver.

The first meeting takes place Jan. 21, and the book selection is "Bared to You" by Sylvia Day. Beer pairings are offered with book selections, and one is encouraged (after a few pints) to sing that old Irish tune, "Ninety-nine bottle of beer on the wall..."

The library has adopted an alcoholic bent with first, the "Wine & Words" authors series wherein popular writers talk about their work in wineries about town. Now, it's a liquid take on a book club dubbed "Beer & Books." When your spouse asks where you are headed, just say you have joined a new book club; then, head straight down to the King Street pub.

Irish Harp owner, Trevor Smyth, originated the concept after hosting a sold-out "Fifty Shades of Grey" party, featuring trivia, book discussion, themed drinks, food and such. He deduced that we enjoy gatherings to discuss all manner of things including great art books like Fifty Shades. It's about painting, right?

Beth-Ann Labelle is the program services coordinator with the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library or as I like to call her, the NOTL PSC. She fell in love with the idea. Who wouldn't? Imagine a job that permits one to drink beer and read books. That's my idea of a great occupation.

The evening is open to everyone, whether they've read the book or not which reminds me of my Men's Book Club. We also drink beer. Few if any read the book. Most perform a Google search and bluff their way through the night while sipping their favourite brew. Each host picks the book. I usually choose Czech books because I love Czech beer. Of course, the books are impossible to read, but I am hoping that someone who speaks Czech might soon join our club.

There is a special themed menu to accompany the beer tasting. In fact, our members seem to enjoy the food and beer far more than reading the books. There is no admission fee to participate but the library would like everyone to register in advance to estimate the numbers. Do not forget to bring your library card. You had also best pay off your overdue books. We don't want any embarrassment at the premier event.

Mr. Smyth has set aside the side room such that members will have the chance to discuss the book unlike other pubs that overwhelm one with mammoth and loud TV sets playing football, soon hockey and for sure, Blue Jay baseball.

The next book selection will be decided at the end of the first meeting. Can you imagine a bunch of people who have been drinking when it comes time to select the next book? Before our club changed the rules to place the choice burden on the host, things often got ugly. "How many pages is it?" some would shout. Then, "Too long; too long; it must be manageable like 'Rob Ford's Charisma,'" they would shout. Perhaps the person who drinks the most beers should pick the next book. We will see.

Trevor Smyth envisions this as a winter series, when most residents of NOTL have fled to warmer climes. Seriously, the place is a ghost town. And aside from a few days of picking frozen grapes (How much fun is that?) there's not much else to do except read books and quaff beer. I think Smyth has a winner here. The evening commences at 7 p.m. If you are diligent unlike the members of the Men's Book Club and you actually want to read the book (We chose magazine articles at first.) Ms Labelle says that anyone looking for copies of the book can stop by the library at 10 Anderson Lane to get a copy.

