

Baranov Plans to Host "Big Read" This Fall

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Kodiak can expect more books and book-related events next year. The Kodiak Historical Society and Baranov Museum recently received a \$15,000 grant to host The Big Read in Kodiak. The event is a program from the National Endowment of the Arts and promotes literacy in America.

Sarah Short is the curator of education for the Baranov Museum and helped organize the grant application. She said the NEA started The Big Read program because of statistics that suggest declining literacy in the nation.

"They have facts like less than half of adults in the American population now read literature for pleasure. And that the percentage of U.S. adult populations reading any book has declined by 7 percent over the last decade. And so they've created this opportunity for communities to gather together and to celebrate reading with specific titles that they provide for you to choose from in order to kind of rejuvenate that love of reading."

Of the titles the Big Read offers, Short said Kodiak chose the collected works of Edgar Allen Poe as the theme of Kodiak's event.

"So we're going to try and stretch him a little bit. He's kind of known for mystery and gothic motif. And so we're going to work with that a little bit in fall and then also look at the effect he's had on other authors and genres since his time, which has really been quite profound."

Short said the event is really more of a series of events that will take place throughout the academic year. She said there will be a kick off celebration in September, with monthly events taking place until the final big event in June.

"The kick off will bring up a performer from California who specializes in educational literature and public performances and has spent a lot of time working on Poe and the idea of Poe. So he's going to come up and we'll have the kick off in the auditorium. And then he'll go around to different schools, we're trying to get him out to some village schools so that he can share the excitement as we get some things going. We're handing out books for

free. We have books that we're ordering in English, Spanish and Tagalog so that people can access those books a little more easily in addition to other resources like the library and other things."

The museum is one of 77 nonprofits nationwide selected to host a Big Read next year. Short said a number of local organizations will take part in the event and help host workshops, art shows, radio programs and book clubs to promote literacy around town. She said applying for the grant was a collaborative process with those organizations that started at the beginning of the year.

"This idea really started to take shape in January when we got together and just started to hash out what would this look like and feel like and what would we want to see happen in Kodiak. And that conversation really gave me most of the meat of the application in terms of all the fun and exciting things we wanted to do and how we were going to make them happen."

Short said they are still very much in the early planning stages and open to more ideas and partnerships. She said the hope is to have a calendar of Big Read events available to the public in August. KMXT will be one of the participating organizations.