

## Greater St. Louis Book Fair celebrates 60 years of supporting literacy

**By:** Amy Burger

Every spring, St. Louisans take part in a much-loved tradition – the Greater St. Louis Book Fair. The largest charity book sale in the Midwest is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year and once again offering hundreds of thousands of books, comics, movies and music. This year’s fair will be held April 23-26 in the parking garage of the West County Center in Des Peres. Organizers expect a turnout of nearly 50,000 patrons.

The book fair was first held in 1950 at Temple Israel in the Central West End; in the 1960s, the event moved to the old Famous-Barr in Clayton.

Kathy Roth, this year’s book fair chair, is one of many locals with fond childhood memories of the event. Roth has attended the fair since 1965 and has been a book fair volunteer for three years.

“I was 10 or 11 years old at my first one,” Roth said. “It was very special to me because it was my first chance to own my own books. I either had loaners from family or the library, and I love to read. When we discovered the book fair, I remember they had paperbacks for \$.10, and I filled my arms with them and just thought it was the most wonderful thing in the world. It has always been very special to me.”

Area resident Christine Hummel recalled a special experience that took place at last year’s fair.

“I was about to check out when I stopped at one last table and a title caught my eye – ‘Collecting Nostalgia,’” Hummel said. “I opened it to see the price, and there was familiar handwriting inside the cover. When I read the inscription and saw the signature, I realized it was my own mother who had given this book to her antique-business partner 30 years ago. How many books passed through the sale? Certainly, the odds of coming across this particular book are astronomical.”

The Greater St. Louis Book Fair brings joy also to the local charitable organizations it benefits. The St. Louis Nursery Foundation, a multi-cultural daycare and children’s learning center, was the beneficiary of the first fair and still is supported by the event today. In addition, grants have been established that support a variety of local literacy and education programs.

In keeping with tradition, opening night of this year’s fair will include an auction of rare, out-of-print and collectible books. A list of auction items is available at [stlouisbookfair.org](http://stlouisbookfair.org).

In honor of the fair’s 60th anniversary, book fair fans are invited to visit [stlouisbookfair.org](http://stlouisbookfair.org) and share special memories of the event and register to win a \$60 book fair merchandise gift certificate.

*60th Annual Greater St. Louis Book Fair*

*80 West County Center*

*Lower level of Macy’s East Parking Garage*

*Hours:*

*Thurs., April 23: 4 p.m. – 10 p.m. with auction at 7:30 p.m.*

*Fri., April 24, and Sat., April 25: 10 a.m. – 9:30 p.m. (Individuals with disabilities may shop from 9 a.m. – 10 a.m. on Saturday.)*

*Sun., April 26: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. (Half-price Day)*

*Mon., April 27: 7:30 a.m. – 10 a.m. for pre-registered 501(c)(3) organizations only.*

*Admission:*

*\$10 on Thursday*

*Free on Friday, Saturday and Sunday*

Greater St. Louis Book Fair then and now

- The first fair was a two-day event in 1950; the 2009 fair will last four days.
- Approximately 23,000 books were collected in 1950; this year’s fair will feature more than half a million books, LPs, CDs, DVDs and other items.
- 1950 sales totaled \$2,500; 2008 sales totaled more than \$250,000.
- 1950 average price range was \$.05 to \$.25; 2009 average price range is \$.50 to \$5.00.
- Estimated 1951 attendance was 7,000; 50,000 are expected to attend this year.
- 50 volunteers staffed the first fair; 600 volunteers will work the 2009 fair.
- 1950 proceeds benefited the Nursery Foundation of St. Louis; 2009 proceeds benefit the Nursery Foundation and 11 additional education and literacy organizations.

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