

Author sets debut novel in Laurel Highlands

Award-winning author Vanita Oelschlager has written 23 children's books as well.

BY JEWELS PHRANER
LIGONIER ECHO

Local author Vanita Oelschlager said she has always loved the wooded trails that she can see from a re-purposed barn where she has written many of her children's books over the last decade.



Oelschlager

The barn, perched high on Stahlstown property that overlooks the Ligonier Valley, serves as part vacation home, part writing laboratory for Oelschlager, 70, and her husband, Jim. The property also inspired the setting of her newly released book written for adults, "Silent is the Magpie."

To celebrate the launch of her debut novel, Oelschlager, with Second Chapter Books owner Laurie McGinnis, will host a book signing from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 4 on the property, called Oak Lodge, in Stahlstown.

Although the Pittsburgh native has had many careers — ranging from teaching to working for her husband's money management firm — she said writing has been her favorite. She wrote her first book at the age of 60.

"I talked to the graduation class at (the University of) Mount Union. I told them be prepared to change careers," Oelschlager said. "The career I've had from (age) 60 to 70 has been the most satisfying, even though I started it later in life."

That's one way Oelschlager said she relates to the main character in "Silent is the Magpie." The novel tells the story of Jamie Barlow, a woman in her 60s who goes on a journey to find herself after her husband's death.

"I watched my mother and mother-in-law sit there and do nothing after their husbands died," Oelschlager said.

If you go:

What: Local author Vanita Oelschlager's book signing

When: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 4

Where: Oak Lodge, 693 Donegal Lake Road, Stahlstown

RSVP: By July 31, by calling 724-593-2913

"There aren't many books with a protagonist who are 67 years old. And you just fall in love with this woman who is fighting to continue living, even though she's no longer a mother and no longer a wife."

With 23 children's books under her belt and the debut of the novel, Oelschlager said she had her own coming-of-age journey after her children had grown.

Although the book is set on property in the fictional "Ligonier Hills,"

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Oelschlager could point to the trails that wind through her real-life Oak Lodge property and recall scenes from the book.

At the signing, tours of the property will be offered.

"I'm excited that it's off-site," Second Chapter Books owner Laurie McGinnis said. "I think it adds interest to the day, and Oak Lodge is so beautiful." It's like a little undiscovered gems of the Laurel Highlands that a lot of people don't know about.

Oelschlager's children's books range from tackling

tough topics such as childhood obesity and adoption to educating young minds on war, dyslexia and grandparents with debilitating diseases.

All the net profits from her books go to charities including the Oak Clinic, a not-for-profit clinic for individuals and families living with multiple sclerosis in Uniontown, Ohio.

Reservations to attend the signing, where Oelschlager will also be signing her children's books, must be made by July 31. Call 724-593-2913 for more information or to RSVP.