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## Glen Ellyn event to put spotlight on literacy effort

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March 26, 2010

"Put down the BlackBerry. Turn off the TV. Set the iPod or iPhone aside and explore your world, literally or figuratively, through art, music and reading -- and you'll be glad you did!"

That's the message of "Steve the Dog & The Winged Tiger," a new book by Glen Ellyn cartoonist Geoff Bevington and writer and co-illustrator Phil Yeh, often called the godfather of the modern American graphic novel.

"Balance, that's what the book is about," Bevington said. "It's about getting outside of yourself. Kids are spending a lot of time viewing a little screen, and the world, the music in it, gets smaller and smaller."

The book features a couch-potato pooch that gets talked out of his Chicago home for the first time ever by Dot, another dog. The magical Winged Tiger takes them to the best of Chicagoland landmarks, far beyond electronic distractions.

"I'm the fat little dog named Steve," Bevington said. Dot resembles his dog Dotty.

Through highly detailed drawings that fascinate kids and adults, the dogs experience the Field Museum, Millennium Park, Frank Lloyd Wright designs in Oak Park, the House of Blues, the Lyric Opera, well-known eateries, Wrigley and U.S. Cellular fields and much more. Even Mrs. O'Leary's cow makes an appearance.

"(Readers) start seeing not just what you can do as a career but what you can learn about," Bevington said. "Steve starts seeing the world differently and becomes a Renaissance dog."

"It's a love story to Chicago, although Phil's a Cubs fan and I'm a Sox fan," he said.

The book debuted last month at Open Books, a nonprofit that operates a bookstore, provides community programs and mobilizes volunteers to promote literacy in Chicago and beyond. A portion of the proceeds benefited the organization. Kids and adults helped Bevington and Yeh paint a mural.

The next mural painting and book signing of limited edition and numbered copies of the book will take place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 3 at Bells and Whistles Snackery, 405 N. Main St. in Glen Ellyn. The cost is \$30, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Glen Ellyn Park District.

Chicago-born Yeh, founder of Cartoonists Across America, and Bevington, who runs the group's Chicago office, will both be there.

The mural, with a Glen Ellyn theme, will be donated to the restaurant after the event, and the restaurant will feature "Steve The Dog & The Winged Tiger" in this summer's Glen Ellyn Scavenger Hunt, Bevington said.

Although born in Chicago as a son of a Chinese father and a Polish Chicago Southside mother, Yeh grew up in Watts in California.

"He saw a lot of violence, a lot of death," Bevington said. "Because he wasn't going to kill anybody, he learned to live by his wits. He used his cartooning skills to stay alive and to cope."

The founder of Famous Amos cookies encouraged Yeh to use his talents to promote literacy, Bevington said.

"We promote literacy and arts advocacy through cartoons and humor," he said. "So many people tell us they learned to read by reading comic books, combining the visual with the words. There has to be a fun message that's not pedantic. Everything we do is non-racist, non-sexist, non-violent. It's not the superheroes."

They plan to adapt the book's concept to other cities worldwide.

"We're working on the (cover's) skyline for Singapore now," Bevington said. In June, they'll coordinate a mural for a \$5 million kids activity park in that city, and Yeh recently returned from painting a mural in Kuala Lumpur.

"A goal is to sell to publishers the books, which they're also showing to Disney," said Bevington, a marketing director for a direct marketing company.

Yeh and Bevington came up with the idea of "Steve the Dog & the Winged Tiger" to promote literacy about 10 years ago, Bevington said. Although the concept sat on the back burner for a decade, he pointed out, "It's become even more important now."

Sandy Stevens has lived in Glen Ellyn since 1984. Contact her at [ssmamabear@aol.com](mailto:ssmamabear@aol.com).