

New Year, New Reading Goals Kris Wiley for The News-Review

For me, a new year means setting reading goals.

This is the year I commit to reading “Honey in the Horn” by Harold L. Davis, the only book by an Oregonian to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction (in 1936). Set at the beginning of the 20th century, “Honey in the Horn” chronicles the lives of homesteaders who have settled in Oregon. Fun fact: Davis was a Douglas County native who lived in Roseburg in his early years.

I also commit to reading at least 10 newly published books by Oregon writers. We are lucky to have a rich literary scene, and I want to share more of that with you.

Finally, I commit to reading books by authors from at least 10 different countries. It is easy to fall back into the habit of reading books set in familiar places, so I think it’s important to be intentional about expanding my literary horizons.

I am getting inspiration from a number of reading lists, including “Most Anticipated: The Great 2023A Book Preview” from The Millions at www.themillions.com; Kirkus Reviews’ “40 Most Anticipated Books of 2023” at www.kirkusreviews.com; and “23 Great Books to Read in 2023,” which actually is a list of about 70 books from Book Riot’s Liberty Hardy at www.bookriot.com.

Although I don’t set a goal for the number of books I want to read in a year, I already have a good start on surpassing last year’s total of 120, and I have read two worth sharing right away.

Based on a recommendation from author Glen Erik Hamilton, who presented a virtual program at the library in October, I picked up Erica Ruth Neubauer’s Jane Wunderly mystery series.

“Murder at the Mena House” introduces Jane, a 30ish-year-old American whose husband died in the Great War. It now is 1926, and Jane’s Aunt Millie has bankrolled their vacation in Egypt, which provides a great backdrop for an eclectic cast of characters and a murder. When Jane is suspected of the crime, she turns amateur detective - and teams up with a handsome, somewhat mysterious Englishman - in order to clear her name.

“Mena House” is a promising start to a series that currently runs to three books that I recommend for fans of strong female protagonists and historical, whodunit mysteries.

I’m still learning about the logging industry, which led me to pick up “Tree Thieves: Crime and Survival in North America’s Woods” by Lyndsie Bourgon. I had no idea timber poaching was such big business, so I appreciated Bourgon’s engaging investigation that combined journalism, science and politics.

I also had no idea that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Lab in Ashland examines wood from around the globe in an effort to tamp down on illegal trading. Those scientists are creating a database that will include the chemical makeup of every endangered tree.

But the most compelling thread centers on Orick, Calif., a community adjacent to the Redwoods National and State Parks that has changed dramatically over the years as the timber industry has declined. Poverty, unemployment and drug use persist, and some folks have turned to timber poaching to make ends meet. That puts them in direct conflict with park rangers, who are charged with protecting a beautiful and dwindling resource.

Those looking for more recommendations can peruse staff picks lists on the library's online catalog at roseburg.biblionix.com; click on Booklists. Happy reading!

This Week's Library Events

10 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 24 – Grab-and-go craft kits while supplies last

10:30 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 25 – Storytime with Aurora

4 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 25 – Club de Idioma Español | Spanish Club for fourth through eighth graders

6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 26 – Silent Book Group