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June 30, 2006 6:59AM

Niles resident has dream of publishing a book come true

First book signing by local author set for Saturday

SHERRY VAN ARSDALL
Tribune Staff Writer

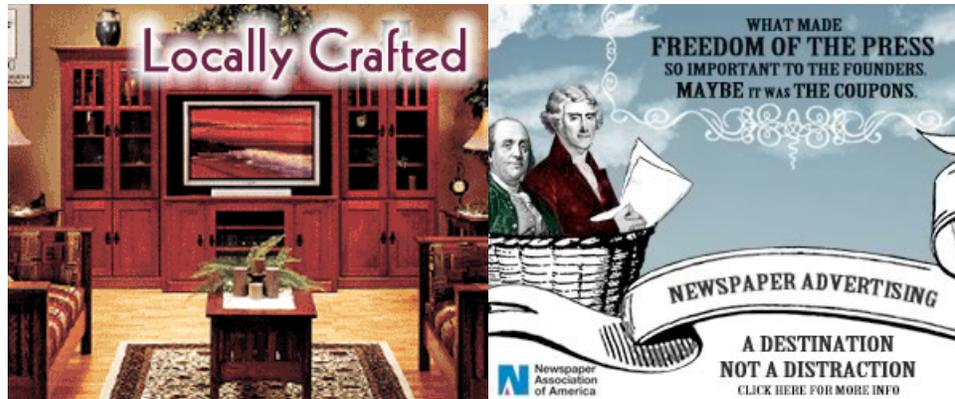
NILES -- Cheri L. Hallwood likes to write in the middle of the night. "It's the ideal time for me," she said.

And during a cold sleepless night in 2003, Hallwood came up with the words for her story, "Winter's First Snowflake."

"It was cold, and it started to snow. Big fluffy snowflakes came down, and I wondered what happens to that first snowflake," Hallwood said.

 Pictured is the cover of a new children's book, "Winter's First Snowflake" by Niles author Cheri Hallwood and Niles illustrator Patricia Rose.

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She took paper and pen and wrote the words down in longhand. The words kept flowing and became a short poem in rhythmical rhyme.

The 59-year-old Niles resident dreamed of becoming a published author.

"I'd always wanted to do this and saw a phrase -- Chase your dream before you're too old to catch it," Hallwood said.

After doing research, she chased her dream and created her own publishing company, Forever Young Publishers.

"My goal is to just have a good quality book. It's taken personal money, a business loan and my dream to make it become reality," she said.

If she can break even, then it will be good because being a self-publisher isn't easy.

"I have to be outgoing, which isn't hard for me," Hallwood said, laughing. "The easy part is writing the story, the business end is the most challenging. It's a constant learning experience."

But it'll be the second most successful accomplishment in her life, she said.

Her first accomplishment was raising children with her husband, Harry.

The couple also have four grandchildren who are her biggest inspiration, she said.

There's a picture of a little girl on the front cover of the hardback book wearing a purple scarf, hat and mittens.

"She doesn't have a name in the story," Hallwood said. "I want children to make up their own name or think of someone they might know who looks like her."

The little girl was created as a composite of the couple's granddaughters by the book's illustrator, Patricia M. Rose, of Niles.

As a self-publisher, Hallwood has the freedom to select her own illustrator.

"We clicked from the beginning and when we met in February of 2005, it was a cold winter day," Hallwood said.

And they have drunk lots of coffee since then while working together.

"I do the fun part. I enjoy working with Cheri," Rose said. "It's a nice working relationship."

Rose used two different types of pastel chalk, hard and soft, for the illustrations.

The soft chalk has a creamy texture which is used after working with hard chalk first.

They're excited because the book will be available at the first book signing from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday at C M Gifts & Christmas Shop, 120 W. Buffalo St., New Buffalo.

"I look back at the beginning and laugh," Hallwood said, looking at her original copy of 32 pages held together with two small binder clips.

"I'm very excited and very pleased with the finished product."

The book will be available for purchase on the Web site, www.foreveryoungpublishers.com, which is set to launch Saturday.

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