

Livingston News



Leonard Bornstein is giving away copies of his children's book, "NoHop," in exchange for donations to Arts Unbound, which has storefronts in Maplewood and Orange.

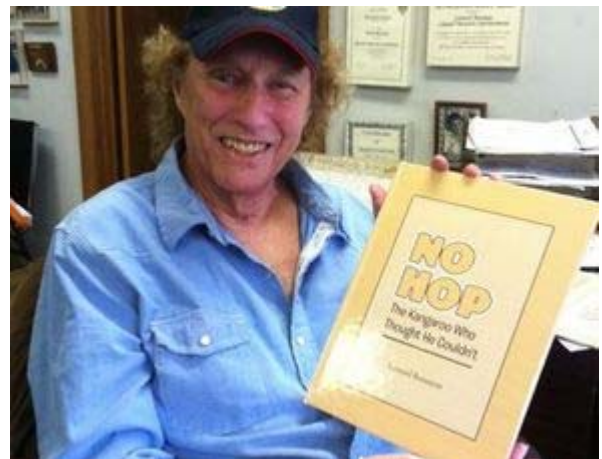
Retired Educator to Sign Copies of His New Children's Book This Weekend

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MAPLEWOOD, NJ – NoHop is a young kangaroo who isn't very good at hopping. He was born with something wrong with his foot and always comes in last when the kangaroos have races. The others make fun of him, and give him the unkind nickname of "NoHop." But a kind friend, a surprise gift and a bit of a turnabout with the head bully turn things around for NoHop.

"NoHop, The Kangaroo Who Thought He Couldn't" is a book by Leonard Bornstein of Maplewood, a retired educator from the Livingston school district. It's aimed at children between the ages of three and five.



Bornstein, who was a school principal and later an administrator in special education, said the idea for the book came to him years ago, long before bullying came into such sharp focus.

"I have a good friend who pointed out to me that there's a subtle discrimination in cartoons against the handicapped," he said. "Daffy Duck has a lisp. Elmer Fudd has a stutter. Mister Magoo is nearly blind. And they're thought of as funny characters. And as a school

administrator, I saw the same thing happening. Kids who are different have to work much harder than the others just to be even.”

Bornstein kept notes on the idea in a folder and planned to someday put it altogether. When he bounced the idea off a couple of his former students, now writers living on the West Coast, they encouraged him to keep going and expand the idea.

And NoHop was born.

“Originally, he had a bad foot, but in the handicapped community, ‘bad’ is a bad word,” Bornstein explained. “So I changed it to him having a problem with his foot.” The story grew from there until NoHop not only had trouble hopping but he had to continually face other kangaroos who ridiculed him for his inability to hop as well as they do.

“The message I wanted to get across is that we all have differences, but you learn how to work around them,” Bornstein said.

When NoHop meets Tami Rose, a young Asian girl who becomes his friend, she gives him a pogo stick and cheers him on as he learns to use it. Soon he not only hops in the kangaroo races, he wins.

“The pogo stick represents a wheelchair or a crutch, anything you need to work around the difference you have,” Bornstein explained. “Tami Rose is a caregiver, a support. She is Asian intentionally – I wanted to make as many differences between them as I could.”

Students in special education are bullied in a way other students aren’t, Bornstein said. They are made fun of about everything from their handicap to the bus that brings them to school. But bullying is, and always has been, a widespread problem.

“Kids make fun of your hair, your dress, where you bought your clothes,” he said. “It’s an old game of finding a leg up on the kid next to you. You don’t understand it that way when you’re a kid, but that’s basically what it is. The bully is saying ‘You’re different than I am, you should be more like me.’”

Bornstein isn’t selling “NoHop.” If you want a copy, he wants a little quid pro quo. He’s having a book signing at [words] bookstore at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 20, which will also feature a reading by Karen Callaway Williams, a dancer and friend of Bornstein’s. He’ll give you a signed copy of his book – which comes with a CD of the NoHop Song – if you’ll make a donation to Arts Unbound, his favorite charitable non-profit.

Arts Unbound, which has storefronts in Orange and in Maplewood, is a non-profit organization that provides arts education, skills building and a variety of vocational opportunities in the visual arts to youth and adults with mental, developmental and physical disabilities.

“I’m not on their board of directors, I just believe in what they do,” said Bornstein, who now operates Premier Events and LB Entertainment, an interactive entertainment company based in

Millburn. “The stories behind the artwork are incredible. You cannot believe the quality, the imagination, the artistic ability of people who are blind, or who have no use of their legs... it’s remarkable.”

Bornstein said he’s glad to give away copies of his book in exchange for a donation to Arts Unbound.

“I’m trying to help as many people as possible in one gesture,” he said.