

Lunch For Literacy – 2026 featuring New York Times Bestselling author, Kristy Woodson Harvey

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of March 9, 2026)

One of our most popular annual events is the Lunch for Literacy program held for the past 34 years. Plan to be at the Oak Ridge High School on Tuesday, March 24, 2026, at 11:30 AM to enjoy a great lunch by Fire & Salt and meet New York Times Bestselling author Kristy Woodson Harvey. She comes recommended to us by our City Manager, Randy Hemann.

Randy knows Kristy's father, Paul Woodson, who has a business in Salisbury, NC. Randy said, "I have known Paul and her mother, Beth, since 1997." So, Kristy agreed to come to Oak Ridge because of this family connection. Randy will introduce Kristy at the luncheon.

As I am the City Historian, I cannot miss this opportunity to say a word of appreciation for our City Manager and his love for history. I asked Randy to tell me something about his interest in history.

He said, "I mentioned one day to Michael Stallo that my Aunt Henrietta Hemann Holbrook lived in this area (I only knew of their time in Clinton), and Michael did some research and found out she was here in the 1940's and lived with her Husband Fella Holbrook (Corps of Engineers), on Tennessee Avenue. Michael even pulled up her Library card. I do not have it here in the office, but her card number was around #3600. They were married at the Chapel on the Hill, and their son Richard Hobrook, my brother Rick's namesake, was a graduate of ORHS. My Aunt Henrietta sent me "Little Golden Books" every year for my birthday when I was growing up. She always wrote a message in them. Making this family connection has been very meaningful to me.

"I am a little bit of a history nerd, always traveling and looking at history. I lived in Salisbury, NC 16 years, a city with over 1,400 properties in National Register Districts. Tennessean Andrew Jackson studied law in Salisbury (1784/85) under Spruce Macay (Mecham makes a very brief mention of Salisbury in his book). Mcay's office was taken apart and put on a railroad car to be shipped to the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, and was never seen again.

"I enjoyed finally getting to the Hermitage. Also, when Daniel Boone went west to "discover" Tennessee, he was outfitted in the Nesbit store in Salisbury (where he left an unpaid bill, I might add). Salisbury was the western outpost in those days, and all of what was to become Tennessee was part of Rowan County, of which Salisbury is the County seat.

"In my downtown development years in Salisbury, I had a revolving fund and was part of a number of renovations. I drug my son through so many historic buildings that one year, when he was young, and we asked him what he wanted for Christmas, he said, 'an old building.'"

How about that? I am proud to have a City Manager who is a self-described "history nerd!"

Kristy Woodson Harvey, New York Times best-selling author of 14 novels and co-host of the hit weekly web show and podcast *Friends and Fiction*, is our speaker at the annual luncheon. Harvey's works have received numerous honors, including Good Morning America's Buzz Pick, Southern Living's Most Anticipated Reads, and Katie Couric's Featured Books. Her writing has appeared in several publications, including Southern Living, Parade, Traditional Home and USA Today.

TNBankl is our 2026 presenting sponsor and will present a scholarship to an Oak Ridge High School Student again this year. Tickets are available for \$60 at TNBank, 401 S. Illinois Avenue, Oak Ridge, TN. Book clubs or others desiring group seating reservations should contact wessel.sandranm@gmail.com.

In addition to an expected upbeat presentation by Kristy Woodson Harvey, there will be opportunity to buy her signed books as well as to pre-order her latest novel *Summer State of Mind*, which is scheduled to be released in May 2026.

Altrusa International of Oak Ridge and Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club proudly again present the Annual Lunch for Literacy Luncheon. Over the years, we have had a wide variety of speakers, some local

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and some even internationally significant. For example, Denise Kiernan's *The Girls of Atomic City* has been printed in multiple foreign languages, including Polish, Italian, Hungarian, Portuguese, and Chinese.

Anna Robinson said, "I have attended the Lunch 4 Literacy for as long as I can remember. It's a wonderful experience to hear authors speak about their work. I have been the coordinator and discussion leader for a book group for almost 30 years. Many of my participants attend the Literary Luncheon. The cost of the event supports literacy, and as far as I am concerned, reading is so important in the life of an individual. If someone can read, they are well ahead of the game! L4L is an important way to promote reading. The guest authors are always interesting and engaging. I am happy to support this event."

Sue Byrne, Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club leader representative, said, "There is an emerging emphasis on reading skills for all ages. This year, new literacy issues include challenges more than reading. Traditional reading is now intertwined with information and media literacy. The ability to evaluate sources, to discern facts from opinion, and to act as a responsible digital citizen is a fundamental need for all ages. We are seeing a significant shift. Literacy includes understanding how to evaluate source data, and to responsibly use artificial intelligence."

But the main reason for Lunch for Literacy is to raise money for grants to fund projects that help improve literacy for all ages. Currently, there were grants of \$32,411.41 in 2025 and \$23,900.34 in 2026 so far. These grants cover a wide range of literacy initiatives.

Donations are welcome at the luncheon or anytime, and checks should be made payable to the ALTRUSA Foundation of Oak Ridge with 'Lunch for Literacy' on the Memo line and given to any of the Lunch for Literacy hosts or mailed to P.O. Box 4164, Oak Ridge, TN 37831

Make plans now to attend and support this initiative to improve literacy in our communities.

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2025 Lunch for Literacy Grant Applications		Amount
Applicant Institution		
Friends of Literacy	OR Preschool Ready, Set, Read	\$3,000.00
ADFAC	2025 School Supplies Program	\$2,000.00
Jefferson Middle School	DIY French Storybooks	\$500.00
Grano Oaks Elementary	Attracted to Literacy	\$3,500.00
Boys & Girls Clubs of TN Valley	Rookie Readers - Anderson County	\$2,000.00
Willow Brook Elementary	Books of Brilliance	\$3,000.00
Boys and Girls Club of Oak Ridge	Making Literacy Comfortable	\$600.00
Clinton Middle School	Reading Exploration	\$1,214.73
Willow Brook Elementary	Code & Create	\$671.68
Willow Brook Elementary	Hand2Mind	\$1,310.00
Emory Valley Center	Creative Curriculum	\$2,000.00
Girls Inc.	Summer Literacy Camp	\$2,000.00
Glenwood Elementary	One Book, One Summer	\$2,500.00
Glenwood Elementary	Book Vending Restock	\$1,000.00
Children's Museum	Charlie's Story Sprouts	\$1,000.00
Ridge View Elementary	Readers are Leaders	\$1,000.00
Roane Imagination Library	Books for 0-5	\$1,500.00
Robertsville Middle School	C-Pen Readers	\$1,615.00
The Arc Anderson County	Enabling Technology	\$2,000.00
Request Total		\$32,411.41

Lunch for Literacy grants for 2025

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2026 Lunch for Literacy Grant Applications		Amount
Applicant Institution		
Grand Oaks Elementary	Library Collection Enhancement	\$4,000.00
ADFAC	School Supplies Program	\$4,000.00
Boys and Girls Clubs of TN Valley	Rookie Readers	\$1,000.00
Willow Brook Elementary	Willow Brook Author Visit	\$1,300.00
Together Podemus	Language Proficiency	\$3,000.00
Glenwood Elementary	Book Vending Machine Restock	\$1,200.00
Glenwood Elementary	Summer Reading Access	\$1,850.00
Girls Inc of TN Valley	Read, Play, Grow Program	\$1,000.00
Friends of Literacy	Literacy To Go	\$3,500.00
Fairview Elementary	Display Shelving	\$1,995.00
Emory Valley Center	Early Literacy and Language Skills	\$1,055.34
Request Total		\$23,900.34

Lunch for Literacy grants for 2026 thus far

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Join us for the
**34th Annual
Lunch for Literacy**
Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Oak Ridge High School
11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Featuring
Kristy Woodson Harvey

New York Times bestselling author of 12 novels, including *The Wedding Veil*, *Under the Southern Sky*, and *The Peachtree Bluff* series.

Tickets \$60

Includes the program, lunch by Fire and Salt, book sales by Union Avenue Books of Knoxville and an opportunity to preorder *Summer State of Mind*, (release date May 2026).

Tickets can be purchased at
TNBANK
401 S. Illinois Ave. Oak Ridge
Mon-Thur 9-4 pm

Books will be available for purchase at the luncheon.

Questions?
Contact: Sue Byrne
SueByrne33@gmail.com

We are proud to announce **TNBANK** as our presenting sponsor for 2026.

Event jointly hosted by
**Altrusa International of Oak Ridge and
Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club**



Lunch for Literacy is a partnership between Altrusa of Oak Ridge and Breakfast Rotary of Oak Ridge. Altrusa and Breakfast Rotary are dedicated to improving literacy in Anderson and Roane Counties.

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