

Book Scene

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(\$25, members; \$30 nonmembers.)

booknotes

Get ready for 'Squirt'

It may not be official, but after Memorial Day, summer play is here.

On Thursday at Riverwalk Crossing in Jenks, the Oklahoma Aquarium and Radio Disney are sponsoring a kids' day premiere with face painting, clowns, balloon animals, Jupiter jump, obstacle courses and lots of food to buy.

At noon author Stacy Nyikos will introduce her book, "Squirt" (Stonehorse Publishing, \$15.95), the story of a young squid. Like all young squid, he can change colors, squirt ink, blast through the waters with his jet-propelled tentacles and imagine himself as a swash-buckling, pirate-dueling, storm-defeating sea captain.

And in the book, he does all that ... with the help of a

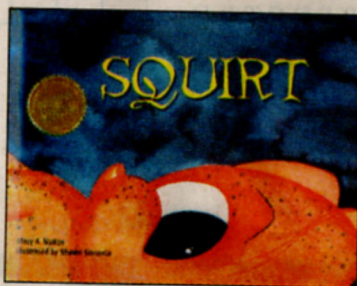
kitchen spoon. As kids read the adventures of this energetic cephalopod, they will learn all sorts of things about squid and their cousins: octopus, nautilus and cuttlefish. The last pages of the book are filled with those facts, called "squid squirts."

At the book party, in between signings, Nyikos will hand out gummi squid and Squirt coloring pages. Kids also can play pin the tentacles on Squirt.

Come September, participating Tulsa schools will hold a drawing contest. Three winners at each school will receive an autographed copy of the book.

Then, in the citywide contest, one artist will win first prize, a sleepover at the Aquarium; second prize is a birthday party at the Aquarium; and third is a one-year youth membership to the Aquarium.

Nyikos is an award-winning academic writer, musician and mother of two. She began writing children's literature two years ago. The book's illustrator is Tulsan Shawn Sisneros. Originally from Maxwell, N.M., he travelled to Tulsa for his undergraduate school work and received a bachelor's from the Art Institute of Chicago. He returned to Tulsa to show his



work and opened a gallery in April.

"The books were not that interesting compared to the colorful toys," Nyikos said.

The mother, a big fan of zoos and aquariums, envisioned combining a fun story, vivid drawings and fascinating facts about oceanic creatures into an exciting children's book. Popular children's author Janell Cannon uses a similar approach to teach about bats in "Stellaluna" and pythons in "Verdi."

"It's sort of a way for a kid to sort of take a part of the aquarium home with them ... to be able to take something tangible home with them that isn't stuffed," Nyikos said.

After the aquarium visit, she awoke the next day with the story of a young squid who watches too much television in her head. While she isn't sure why she chose a squid, she said the tale is based on her childhood in Indiana. During long, cold winters, she spent too many hours watching TV, to her mother's dismay.

"I was going through the same problem with Bella at that time," said Nyikos, whose other daughter, Sophia Kohrs, is 3.

Nyikos, statistics lab coordinator for the University of Oklahoma Schusterman Center, had never studied marine biology. She has a doctorate in political science and has won awards writing about courts. But she had never written a children's book.

The Jenks aquarium doesn't have squids. It boasts other members of the cephalopod family — such as a giant Pacific octopus and cuttlefish.

"They're such a mysterious creature," Nyikos said. "What better creature to introduce to kids."

She started reading books about squid, talking to the aquarium's cephalopod expert and learning about the creature's extraordinary abilities. She asked a Tulsa artist she and husband Rainer Kohrs had earlier commissioned for a painting to do the illustrations.

Shawn Sisneros mostly creates contemporary oil paintings, but he took on the book project as a challenge.

"It was a challenge because, as an illustrator, I feel like that when you're doing something for a book, you have to be able to tell a story. And I'm not that good at telling stories, verbally anyway," Sisneros said. "The 32 images have to flow together from beginning to end."

Sisneros created his early drawings based on what he knew about market squid. But as he researched squid and other sea creatures on the Internet, in books and at the aquarium, his vision of Squirt evolved into a cute bobtail squid with a pudgy body and big eyes.

The pair worked through