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Little 'Squirt' turning into big hit for Tulsa author

By **JULIE GUSTAFSON**
Lifestyles Editor

Stacy Nyikos isn't afraid to knock on a few doors and it's paying off.

"Squirt," her first children's book, is making a splash from Houston to Chicago.

And it all started with a visit with her two children to the Oklahoma Aquarium in Jenks. Published in early 2005, "Squirt" is the tale of a young squid who learns the importance of imagination. The story is both entertaining and educational,



STACY NYIKOS

Meet the Author

What: "Squirt" book signing with Stacy Nyikos and illustrator Shawn Sisneros and visit by the Oklahoma Aquarium's WOW unit.
When: 2-4 p.m. Saturday
Where: Barnes & Noble, 41st Street and Yale Avenue

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Nyikos said.

"That's why the last two pages of the book are filled with fun facts about squid," she said. "I thought it would be great if there was a book that you could take home and share as a family and continue learning about what you experienced at the aquarium."

Nyikos, an award winning academic writer, founded her own company, Stonehorse Publishing, in 2004 and began focusing on children's books. She spent the summer promoting "Squirt" at bookstores and aquariums around the country.

The book has drawn critical acclaim.

It now can be found at Landry's restaurants, including the Rain Forest Café and the Downtown Aquarium in Houston. "Squirt" also is in gift shops at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago and two aquariums on the East Coast. In October, she is a featured speaker at the Chicago Book Festival. A toy Squirt soon will be for sale.

"We just picked up Sea World, which is huge for a small publishing house," Nyikos said. Landry's was so impressed, they

have hired Nyikos to create and publish a book based on one of their characters.

To introduce the book this spring, she visited local schools and held a coloring contest. Nyikos credits Tulsans and the Oklahoma Aquarium with the attention the book has received nationally.

"(I am) enthusiastically happy, to put it mildly," she said. "People in Tulsa have been very supportive. Sea World was through a contact with people I grew up with in Tulsa.

"Having the Oklahoma Aquarium support the book as it has is a great visiting card for all the other aquariums in the U.S."

On Saturday, Nyikos will kick off the second coloring contest for area first graders at a book signing in Barnes & Nobles at 41st Street and Yale Avenue. Nyikos and book illustrator Shawn Sisneros will sign copies and explain how a children's book goes from the drawing board to the page.

"Our goal through this program is to foster young artists," she said.

The aquarium's Water on Wheels exhibit will be at Barnes so children can experience the sea creatures for themselves.

Schools participating in the drawing contest will be visited by Nyikos and Sisneros, who

will read the book and teach them tips on drawing Squirt. Nyikos said it is a unique way to teach and empower children.

"Students who read the book realize that Squirt was first named 'Sid the Squid,'" Nyikos said. "When we explain that my 5-year old, who is now 6, named him Squirt, they really feel empowered. I know my daughter did. How many 5-year-olds get to name a book?"

Children can draw Squirt in his own adventure and Stonehorse Publishing and the staff at the Oklahoma Aquarium in November will choose three city-wide drawing contest winners.

First place wins a sleepover at the aquarium. Second prize is a birthday party at the aquarium; third prize is a one-year youth membership to the aquarium. An individual winner at each school will receive free admission to the aquarium.

Any school in the Tulsa area is eligible to participate. Schools will receive copies of "Squirt" and Nyikos and Sisneros will visit the school.

For more information about the drawing contest contact Nyikos at (918) 409-4063.

"Squirt" is available at Border's Book, Steve's Sundry, Barnes and Noble, Snow Goose, King's Kids and Cat and the Fiddle.

'grief just takes time' but this is only time is properly spent," Moeller said. Seminar is free and open to the public. No registration is required. For more information or needing additional information can call 2-2518.

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TURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Despite gas prices, AAA expects record number of travelers during Labor Day

Higher gas prices are not expected to keep Oklahomans home during the Labor Day weekend, according to AAA Oklahoma.

The auto club projects 380,000 Oklahomans will travel 50 miles or more from home this holiday, a 0.8 percent increase from the 377,000 who traveled last year.

AAA estimates 34.5 million Americans nationwide will be traveling over the Labor Day holiday period, up 0.9 percent from Labor Day 2004.

About 359,000 Oklahomans expect to go by motor vehicle and 21,000 will fly. Nationally, 83 percent of all holiday travel will be on the road.

"Even with record high gas prices, an early start to the hurricane season, terror attacks in London and a weak dollar, Americans are traveling in record numbers just as they have all

ers reflect a smaller increase than we've seen the last few holidays."

For the first time since Aug. 3, AAA's Fuel Gauge Report shows the national average price for gasoline has dropped. Today's survey shows self-serve regular is now at \$2.611, down from yesterday's record price of \$2.614.

State gas price averages have also declined for the first time in 20 days. The Oklahoma statewide average today is \$2.517, Oklahoma City stands at \$2.523 and Tulsa is at \$2.487.

AAA's Leisure Travel index shows other vacation costs up from Labor Day 2004. Hotel rates have increased, averaging 8 percent more at a sampling of AAA-rated Three Diamond hotels in 20 cities across the U.S.

Airfares are also up about 8 percent. Car rental rates have increased as well, by 5 percent.

Research for holiday travel is based on a na-