



School News

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School

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LOCAL AUTHOR PUBLISHES CHILDREN'S BOOK

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STAMFORD — On Sunday, Jason Alter brought his two children, Ross, 12, and Lindsay, 8, to Borders on High Ridge Avenue to look at a book the two children can probably quote from memory: "John Fastramp and the Dakota 3000."

It would have been a thrill to be able to show his kids the book he'd written for them on Borders' shelves, but when he got to the display Alter discovered something even more exciting. His book was sold out.

Alter self-published the book in June of this year, but Fastramp — a fictional racer with an incredible car known as the Blue Spider — lived for years in the imaginations of the Alter family. He and the Blue Spider came to life eight years ago as a series of bedtime stories for Ross, who loves cars. In time, Lindsay also began hearing the stories. Alter's wife, Lisa, named virtually all the characters.

Fastramp zoomed out of the Alter household in 2006, when Northeast Elementary School used the John Fastramp manuscript in their annual Battle of the Books reading program. Close to 20 fourth graders read the story, and 10 of them wrote essays about the book, which Alter sent out in his quest to sell "John Fastramp" to publishers.

The publishers were polite but firm — the book was a good read, but didn't fit their needs; kids might relate better to the story if John Fastramp and his friends were children.

"I wasn't willing to spend years trying to get it published through traditional publishers," said Alter. This spring, he contracted with BookSurge, a pub-

lishing company associated with Amazon.com, to publish "John Fastramp and the Dakota 3000." The 86-page book has a comic book feel, owing mainly to the Flash Gordan-esque illustrations provided by Alter's friend, artist Kirk Manley.

The response to the book, which became available on June 1, has been fantastic, said Alter.

"The reaction I get from children and families has been incredible," he said. "My goal is to get a traditional publisher to pick up this book."

Alter, who works in marketing for a biotech firm, spends roughly 10 hours a week promoting the book. He makes phone calls to independent book sellers on his lunch hour, and spends evenings and weekends bringing small shipments of books to stores throughout Fairfield County.

So far, John Fastramp and the Blue Spider are parked in the Stamford and Fairfield Borders, The Stamford Toy Store, DandyTales in New Canaan, Linda's Storytime in Monroe, and Barrett Bookstore in Darien. So far, more than 70 books have been sold.

The book is also being translated into Braille at the New York Institute for Special Education in the Bronx and is being printed in large type for visually impaired children, said Alter. Kim Benisatto, operations manager for the institute, could not be reached for comment.

Alter will be working with parent-teacher organizations in Stamford this year to get his book into local book fairs and will also be a vendor at the Festa di Ferrari on Sept. 30 at the Stamford Italian Center. He will donate some of his proceeds to the three charities supported by the event: the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Connecticut, Twin Meadows and Stamford's Marine Corps League Wounded Veteran's Assistance Fund.