

Author's 1st book a hit with U.S. moms

By Jonathan Allen
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TEGA CAY — Local author Ginger Hodge is getting national recognition for her first book, "When Donkeys Fly," first published last summer.

The book has been awarded a 2009 Mom's Choice Gold Award for Inspirational/Motivational Children's Picture Books. The Mom's Choice Awards were founded seven years ago by Tara Patterson, who also started the Just For Moms Foundation. Every year, a panel of judges including people like "Reading Rainbow" founder Dr. Twila Liggett, "Baby Einstein" creator Julie Aigner-Clark, best selling author Jodee Blanco and "Chicken Soup for the Soul" co-author LeAnn Thieman, sift through thousands of entries in a multitude of categories to choose worthy projects, according to Executive Director Dawn Matheson.



Ginger Hodge

"Each product is evaluated on its own merits," Matheson said. "They're competing against our standard, not the other entries."

Hodge's book was among more than 1,200 entries for the inspirational/motivational children's picture book category. The judging is based on a proprietary formula, so Matheson said she couldn't discuss it in detail, but the judges evaluate each entry in nine areas: purpose; content; quality of illustrations; creativity; originality; interest and appeal to its stated audience; if it has a moral or lesson; quality of production; and value.

To win a gold award, the product must score 90 percent or higher and every entry is judged by at least five judges, Matheson said.

"We're like the 'Good House Keeping' Seal of Approval or 'Better Homes and Gardens,'" she said.

Hodge learned of the MCA through the Independent Publishers Association, of which she is a member (Hodge published "When Donkeys Fly" herself).

"We saw the Mom's Choice Awards and figured we couldn't go wrong," Hodge said. "Then we saw who the judges were and we were really excited."

Hodge's friend C.B. Markham provided the illustrations for the book and deserves much of the credit for the award, Hodge said.

She has gone through most of the first printing of "Donkeys," a total of 5,000 books, and plans to print a second edition in the spring. That new edition will carry the Mom's Choice Award seal on the cover. Currently, the book is sold in Barnes and Noble and in Borders book stores and in several small independent book shops. It is also being distributed by a company called Sollett that specializes in the education market.

She also sells signed copies through the book Web site, www.whendonkeysflybook.com.

Hodge and Markham are also working on a follow up to "Donkeys" called "When I get a Dog." Markham is working on the illustrations now. It should be ready for a fall press run, Hodge said.

"This award has opened a lot of possibilities for us," Hodge said. "The recognition gets you into a lot of catalogues you otherwise wouldn't be in."

Local author pens children's book

By Jonathan Allen
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TEGA CAY — Some authors toil endlessly over their work, but for Ginger Hodge, her first book came more like a bolt of lightning.

"One day when I was driving home it just all came to me," Hodge said. "I wrote it all out in about seven minutes, I couldn't write it down fast enough."

Hodge's first book is called "When Donkeys Fly." Years ago, a former boyfriend said the phrase to her and she thought immediately it would make a great children's book.

"I guess it was just rattling around in my head for a while," Hodge said.

She wrote the story about three years ago, then set out to find someone to illustrate it. She sent a few letters, including a draft of the story, to friends and contacts from her job in film acquisitions



with UAV, which used to operate in the township. One of those letters went to C.B. Markham, a friend from college now living in Atlanta.



Ginger Hodge

"She wrote back, 'I'm illustrating your book, I don't care if you don't use it, but I'm doing it,'" Hodge said.

Hodge liked what she saw, and over the next three years Markham completed about two dozen watercolor illustrations. The book is set to publish in June. Hodge and another friend from her UAV days are publishing the book themselves through a printer in Dallas. They already have it listed with Baker and Taylor, a company that distributes books and videos nationally, mostly to libraries and schools.

"When Donkeys Fly" is the story of a young girl who at every turn is told she can't do something that she wants to do, with the common response

of "you can do it when donkeys fly." It is a message to children not to let other people dictate to them what they can and can't do, Hodge said.

It's also a message to parents to nurture rather than squelch their children's dreams.

Hodge is already getting some feedback on the book. Joy Price, the media specialist at Gold Hill Elementary School, has been reading the book to students and asking them to discuss it. Hodge even sat in on some of the classes. A little to her surprise, most of the children who were asked thought the book, even though its main character is a girl, was a story for both boys and girls. In fact, only one student thought it was geared only toward girls.

Hodge and Markham made some changes to the illustrations based on the students' comments.

Her goal is to get it into libraries around the country first so people will be familiar with it when it shows up later in book stores. She has other novel marketing ideas, including hiring a plane to fly a banner with the book's Web site (www.whendonkeysflybook.com) and a flying donkey over outdoor events this summer.

Sadie, Hodge's golden retriever mix may be the star of her next book. She plans to call it "For the Love of Sadie." It will be the story of a child who wants a dog.

