



Top: Judy Pedersen's unadorned folk style is well suited to children's book illustration. Pedersen co-founded the Warwick Children's Book Festival. Bottom: Pedersen at her home studio with Hugo, who appears in her work. PHOTOS BY MELISSA SHAW-SMITH

# Kid lit festival gets serious and seriouser

By Melissa Shaw-Smith

Have you been hit on the face by a hardcover as you struggled — and failed — to keep your eyes open long enough to finish it? Have you ever slipped on a pile of books, banana-peel style? If you answered yes, you're probably a parent of a youngin'. Finally, there's a literary festival for this book club of kids and the parents vast but mostly unacknowledged who read, and re-read, and re-read them to sleep.

"I'd gone to some festivals and I loved picture books," said Judy Pedersen, founder of the Warwick Children's Book Festival, now in its fifth year. "It seemed an obvious thing that our town should have a book festival"

Pedersen, a children's book illustrator, shows me around her studio. On the walls are several posters for the festival. Pedersen designs the postcards and posters, creating new artwork each year.

28 dirt September-October



Her desk is surrounded by small figurative paintings and sculptures she has made from clay or found objects. These characters reappear in her work, along with the white dog that greeted me at the door. "I've always been drawn to picture books, even as a teenager — words and pictures together was the crux of it," she said. Pedersen has published seven picture books, three of which she also wrote. Her unadorned folk style is well suited to the medium. "I'm much more of a visual person than a verbal person, so I often start with a little spot illustration." A perk of co-organizing is that Pedersen gets to choose whom to invite, like renowned author and professional storyteller Jane Yolen, and prolific illustrator G. Brian Karas. Among the new books he'll be bringing is one with a very local focus. *On the Farm, At the Market* tells the story of three farmers as

they prepare their produce, set up their stalls, and greet their customers, culminating in a special feast. Karas likes the festival's community vibe. "Everyone comes out for it," he said.

This year's festival will showcase over 60 authors and illustrators, many of whom will, along with autographing books, perform shenanigans like making paper hats. It takes over Railroad Ave. on Saturday, October 8.