



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Rose Ann Woolpert (right), company historian at Graniterock, talks about her second children's book, "Big Bill and His Little Mixer Truck," Wednesday as Shanna McCord Crigger, director of content, listens in.

Children's book continues Graniterock story

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By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

WATSONVILLE — In a way, the sprawling network of roads, sidewalks, highways and buildings that crisscross Santa Cruz County and much of the state can be read like a history text.

They tell the story of the people and companies who have built up the county over the past century, and much of this work can be credited to Watsonville-based Graniterock.

Now, company historian Rose Ann Woolpert hopes to tell those stories in a series of children's books intended to be at once entertaining and educational, and to give a glimpse into the history of the 114-year-old company.

"These people contributed to the building of our region," Woolpert said. "They built important parts of our community and it's important to

tell that story."

Her first book, published last year, was "Engine Number 10," which told the story of former Graniterock CEO Bruce Woolpert as a child, and how he convinces his grandfather, founder A.R. Wilson, to use an old, retired train engine to help the company out of a jam.

Bruce Woolpert was also Rose Ann's husband. He died in a 2012 boating accident on Lake Tahoe.

Her second and most recent book tells a similar tale.

Set in the 1950s, "Big Bill and His Little Mixer Truck" is the story of longtime employee Bill Van Sandt, who started with the company when he got out of the U.S. Navy and stayed for nearly five decades driving a cement mixer.

After facing lighthearted hazing from his coworkers during his first day, Van Sandt begins to wonder

whether the job is right for him. But when he meets his truck for the first time the 1950 Ford cement mixer asks Van Sandt if he'll help it do its job.

Van Sandt answers, "yes I will," which is both a reference to Graniterock's "Yes We Will" motto and the main theme of Woolpert's books.

The next day Van Sandt and his new truck were tasked with helping to build a new store, and Live Oak School the day after that. He and the truck even helped build a large local hospital, despite naysayers who said the truck was too small.

Graniterock still owns Van Sandt's old truck, and displays it at the Santa Cruz County Fair and other events such as parades.

To create her stories Woolpert delves into the company's histori-

See BOOK, page A14

BOOK

From page A1

cal archives, interlaces the life stories of real employees and colors it all with a mix of fiction and non-fiction for a genre she calls "nearly true."

And in that way, Woolpert hopes to teach children about the work of a company whose work often goes unnoticed.

"I think it's important for kids to find out that we have a history and look at what's under their feet," she said. "We take these things for granted, I think."

She also plans a third in the "Yes We Will" series, in addition to a longer chapter book.

While Woolpert's books help tell the story of the company, she they have also been a way for her to remember her husband. The couple had been married for 24 years.

"I wanted people to know what a special spirit Bruce had," she said. "You don't expect someone who runs a cement company to care about people



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The cover of the book features a photograph of Graniterock's 1950 Ford, two-cubic-yard concrete mixer truck.

so much. I'm just trying to share his spirit in these books."

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Rose Ann Woolpert will be signing "Big Bill and His Little Mixer Truck" during the following times:

- 5-7 p.m. Oct. 2 - Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce mixer at Graniterock headquarters, Watsonville

- 1-3 p.m. Oct. 8 - Crossroads Books, Watsonville

- 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Oct. 11 - Watsonville Fly-In

Both books also come in Spanish, and are geared for kids ages 3-8. They are available on Amazon, Graniterock retail locations and select bookstores.