

## BREAKING NEWS

# Orlando adults erase their stresses through coloring

By Bethany Rodgers

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Sharon Scott uses a colored pencil during a "Color Me Calm" adult coloring event at the Minneola Schoolhouse Library on Thursday, December 10, 2015. (Stephen M. Dowell / Orlando Sentinel)

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Stress can come in more **hues** than you'll find in a box of **crayons**.

But in Central Florida and elsewhere, adults in need of a break are finding peace inside the blank spaces of a coloring page.

Fans of the rainy-day activity that has **taken off** in popularity say it can induce a meditative state that helps people ease their anxieties and **unwind**.

"I always experience calmness when I color with my grandchildren," Clermont resident Mary Ellen MacKay said.

Lately, she and **grown-ups** around the **globe** have been enjoying the calmness, **minus** the children.

Ten of the top 20 best-selling books on Amazon are adult coloring books — not to be confused with the simpler versions many might remember from childhood.

Coloring books published in recent months offer page after page of **intricately** drawn **mandalas**, animals, **inspirational** phrases or **woodland** scenery. Some are so large and detailed, they can take hours to fill in.

Just two of the best-selling coloring books, "Secret Garden" and "Enchanted

Forest," have been printed 13.5 million times, according to a spokeswoman for Laurence King Publishing.

"There isn't even a **superlative** that could describe the market growth. It's grown by 10 or 15 times this year and is not slowing down yet. I've never seen anything like it," said Gabe Coeli, co-founder of a publishing group that produces Blue Star Coloring books.

Blue Star has **turned out** 40 coloring-book titles since forming in March, Coeli added

Book stores and libraries around the region are responding to the **craze** by organizing group events where people can pick up their colored pencils together.

The Minneola Schoolhouse Library in Lake County is hosting a series of four sessions called "Color Me Calm." At one December morning **gathering**, blackberry and **caramel-vanilla** tea bags **steeped** on the **tabletop**, and a **flute** melody called "Morning Stillness" **drifted out of** the CD player.

MacKay, one of those who came to color, used watery tones to **shade** a **peacock** illustration. Rae Menke, 56, **a fellow** Clermont resident, worked on transforming a colorless **flamingo** into a **swirl** of orange, blue, green and purple **feathers**.

MacKay, 71, said there's something **restful** about **engaging in** a **tactile** activity that demands a degree of attention.

"You're focusing so thoroughly on one thing rather than letting your mind go," she said.

There is research to back up the idea that coloring can be **relaxing**.

During a 2005 study at Knox College in Illinois, students were asked to spend 20 minutes coloring a mandala or **plaid** design or free color on a **blank** piece of paper. The **undergraduates** who worked on the patterns experienced a significant reduction in anxiety, while coloring on a blank page didn't help **ease their stress**.

said Tim Kasser, a psychology professor who helped with the research.

The study didn't delve into what caused this outcome, but Kasser said the calming effects of repetition might have something to do with it.

"We think that engaging in that structured coloring exercise, it has some parallels to what people do when they meditate or when they pray the rosary, for example," Kasser said.

The concept of coloring as a meditative aid has caught on with religion publishers, who have started producing their own versions of the popular books.

Donna Kannon, bookstore manager for Northland church in Longwood, said she sells a Psalms coloring book and another that features Bible passages accompanied by illustrations. Working on a picture can help focus people whose thoughts tend to wander, she said.

"As a spiritual discipline, we don't do silence and solitude very well," she said.

"When you're coloring, it makes you focus on one thing, so ... you can meditate on Scripture."

Sylvia Norman, Orlando chapter leader for the Modern Widows Club, said her group in November hosted a coloring workshop, in part to teach members a new technique for dealing with emotion. Norman said since then, she has been doing coloring and ink drawing as a way to unwind.

"I don't really know how to explain it. It's very calming, very therapeutic," Norman, 49, of Winter Garden said.

Diane Merchant, manager of the Minneola library, said she started the coloring events at the suggestion of a friend. Though the surge of interest in the pastime is new, she said her aunt, now in her 80s, has been coloring for years.

"She's a trendsetter," Merchant said.

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**LATEST**



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