



## COMMUNITY

## Are You There, Judy?

Jersey pals are making an event out of Blume adaptation.

**T**he April opening of the long-awaited film version of the iconic book *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, has middle-aged women all around New Jersey aligning calendars with pals and posting plans on Facebook to watch the movie together.

Cassandra Dorn, 54, will make a detour on her way to the theater to see the movie, stopping at the Judy Blume Service Area on the Garden State Parkway in Wall to pay homage to the author of the book, a New Jersey native.

"From there, we will caravan to a movie theater and watch the movie as a Judy Blume sisterhood," says Dorn, of

West Long Branch, who wants to snap photos of her friends under the rest-area sign. She's also exploring renting a theater to watch the film with friends.

"I think every woman of a certain age, and it spans decades, has read that book and almost saw that book as a friend in adolescence," says Dorn, an English teacher at Red Bank Regional High School.

The film reminds them of a time when they were struggling with puberty, and information on body changes wasn't as accessible. The feminine-hygiene brands in the book, which was originally published in 1970, might be outdated now, but not its message, prompting mothers to

share the book with daughters and granddaughters. The novel remains popular today.

The New Jersey Hall of Fame recently completed its Judy Blume exhibit inside the highway-service-area building. An inside wall features photos of Blume and covers of her books—including *Are You There God?*

Jackson resident Tina Kas, 54, has planned a dinner-and-movie night with friends who connected through a local moms' club when they had preschoolers. That was 15 years ago, and now they are ordering *Are You There God?* on Kindle to reread before seeing the film.

"It covers what a lot of young girls go through," said Kas, the mom of two teen boys. "It was realistic; it really covers that age." Kas, like Dorn, hopes the film does the book justice.

The city of Elizabeth, Blume's hometown, hopes to host 30-40 residents for a showing at a local theater, says Ruby Contreras, city spokeswoman. Elizabeth resident Emily Ruiz, 55, wants to be at the top of that invite list. Ruiz recalls that her single mother worked a lot, and would never discuss the topics Blume covered. Ruiz says she learned about menstruation from *Are You There God?*

"Judy Blume made me feel safe, she made me feel accepted, that it was OK to be a late bloomer. She had a huge impact on my life," says Ruiz, a business administrative analyst for the city of Elizabeth. Noting that the main character has questions about religion, Ruiz says she began talking to God after reading the book.

Carolyn Edgar, of Toms River, was overjoyed when she heard about the movie. "The first thing I did, besides squeal with excitement, is I called up my friends," says Edgar, 51, about her five pals from high school. The long-time fans want to invite Blume to their theater to watch the movie with them.

Blume has not announced any plans to be in the Garden State for the premiere, but she seems happy about the love from locals. "I'm excited to learn my Jersey girl fans are planning to see *Margaret* together. It's nostalgic, for sure, and I hope they love it as much as I do," Blume said in a statement.

—Sharon Waters