



DIRECTOR AND STAFF REPORT

Connie Behe, Director

“Why do we have public libraries in America? We should cut the fat and let people pay for their own information. Make them private.”

Elite access only—The early colonists knew that without the printed page they would lose their knowledge, culture and ideas. However, from 1600s to the early 1800s, libraries and reading rooms were available only to very elite parts of the community or to those belonging to a certain social class or group. This limited access to libraries caused the people of Peterborough, NH to tax themselves to support a public library in 1833. (That library still exists today.)

Access limited to formal education—Access to information for most people at this time ended when they left school. Community members were concerned that people could not inform themselves outside of school, “putting the Republic at risk.” This resulted in elected officials creating the first public library to try to make information accessible beyond the classroom (1854 in Boston, MA).

Rural communities left out—The creation of public libraries spread like wildfire in American cities. But there was no funding for outlying areas and rural communities continued to lack access. Montana was no exception. In response the Montana State Legislature encouraged “the establishment, adequate financing, and effective administration of free public libraries in this state to give the people of Montana the fullest opportunity to enrich and inform themselves through reading” (1947).

The Flathead County Public Library was created by County resolution in 1942 after a seven-year effort led by Mrs. M. C. Manning of Lower Valley. “It grieved her (Mrs. Manning) to know that the rural people of the county did not have adequate library service and many could not afford the fee of five dollars which was required to use the Carnegie City Library.” (History of the Flathead County Free Library” written by librarian Cornelia K. Sherman in the 1950.) Those early efforts led to the affordable library services and cooperation between towns we see today in Flathead County.

Protecting access and freedom—The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” Benjamin Franklin noted: “Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government: When this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved, and tyranny is erected on its ruins.” Public libraries uphold this important liberty by making books and information freely available and allowing patrons to decide for themselves what is appropriate.

- Excerpted from the "Everyone's Library" info page about the Bigfork Library, written by Martha Furman

JULY 22, 2021

As the outgoing director, I have the obligation to help the public, staff, and policymakers understand the history of public libraries and the roles of the director and Board.

As public servants, the library director and staff don't get to cherry-pick which interests, perspectives, and values are represented through library materials and programs, even when it violates their own values and perspectives, or those of Trustees.

The incoming director can anticipate pressure to violate some of their responsibilities from every possible direction (patrons, uninformed staff, vocal and financially influential donors, volunteers, and policymakers).

Often people do not understand the intersection of advice-giving and decision-making roles that the director and Board have, depending on the decision at hand. The director has the responsibility to make decisions based on their expertise regarding the management of staff, programs, facilities, and the budget. The Board makes recommendations to the director, but on those decisions listed, the director is the decision-maker.

Conversely, Board Trustees have accepted several responsibilities, most of which are very different than the director. On policy-level decisions, the Trustees are the decision-makers and the director is in the role of offering their professional and impartial advice as well as subject matter expertise. Trustees are obligated to secure funding and resources for adequate levels of library service in their community.

To serve the community the best, it is recommended that Trustees find a director who is dedicated to the mission of the library, not to her/his own personal agenda. Someone who will not bend to the will of the loudest patrons, the financially influential donors, nor the Board members themselves, but will listen to and consider all perspectives and make mission-driven decisions for the library and community. And, someone who understands their obligation to the public to be responsive, responsible, and transparent.

I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to serve the public of Flathead County as their public library director and to do my best to protect the library's promise to provide critical access to free information to the entire community. I wish you all the best into the future.

JULY 22, 2021

Operations, Public Services, Communications

MARTHA FURMAN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Out of office

ELLIE NEWELL, YOUTH SERVICES LIBRARIAN

Summer Experience

1,863 kids and teens have picked up their Summer Experience Adventure Kits and Guidebooks, and we still have two weeks to go. For comparison, 1,373 kids registered for Summer Experience in 2019. It's terrific to see such enthusiasm in our community for reading and learning all summer long. Keep up the great work, Flathead County Youth!

We've presented three of our nine Outdoor Early Literacy Classes to enthusiastic preschoolers and caregivers. Cumulatively, 106 kids and 66 caregivers have read, sang, and danced with us, building those pre-reading skills. Becca, Liza, and I have all noted that returning to these in-person programs after a 16-month hiatus has been emotional and extremely fulfilling. Personally, I'm delighted by how many of our regular families have welcomed new babies in the past year and how grown up the former toddlers are now. New faces, new stages, and the same wonderful job of connecting little ones to books and learning.

Ashley continues to facilitate fabulous hands-on learning opportunities during our weekly Pop-Up Summer Learning series, held in partnership with School District 5's free lunch program. During a recent program, kids and caregivers collaborated to build swirling towers with Keva Planks and explored physics with Hula hoops.

Becca is doing a wonderful job coordinating our popular Story Strolls across the county. We've set up Story Strolls around the Kalispell library, along the Bigfork Nature Trail (Mad Mile River Walk), at Lawrence Park's Nature Trail in Kalispell, around the playground at Pinewood Park in Columbia Falls, and leading from the Westshore Community Library through Volunteer Park in Lakeside. We're looking forward to more strolls at Lone Pine State Park, along the River's Edge Park in Columbia Falls, and at the Creston Fish Hatchery Nature Trail.

Program Evaluations and Changes

The pandemic has given the Youth Services Team an opportunity to catch our breath and reevaluate how we distribute our most precious resource: staff time. As I've mentioned in past reports, we're working on evaluating our responsibility towards addressing Columbia Falls youth's need for safe, free, year-round places to gather and be around supportive adults. Wired Wednesday has had some scope creep over the past few years. At times, it has strained our relationship with the City of Columbia Falls. We're evaluating our capacities, how this program fits into our mission, and how we can move forward sustainably. I'll also evaluate our other Youth Services programs along similar lines later this summer. We recently had all three of our branches evaluated by fire chiefs for safe occupancy numbers. The great news is we now have this information and can proceed under safer guidelines. The tough news is we will likely have to begin limiting attendance for in-person programs in the fall. Bigfork has been approved for 16 people, Columbia Falls 64, and the Kalispell first floor 108, including staff. Youth Services program attendance pre-pandemic routinely exceeded those numbers. We'll need to devise a solution to keep our patrons and staff safe – perhaps ticketed entry, reservations, outdoor programs while weather permits, multiple iterations of the same program, or working with community partners who have larger spaces. Regardless of our solution(s), this is going to be tough for youth and their families. Our community's needs for early literacy education and hands-on learning exceeds our buildings' capacities.

JULY 22, 2021

KAT WILSON, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE LIBRARIAN

A very big welcome to Ben Mason who has accepted the library advisor position! Ben has been working as a materials handler for the past year. I know he will be greatly missed in the Collection Services Department, but we are very excited to have Ben join the Customer Experience Team. His first day will be July 27th and I am hard at work creating his training plan. Congratulations, Ben!

Last year, we collaborated with Kalispell Regional Health to coordinate the use of iPads and hotspots for people participating in a grant funded stakeholder group. Participants would come to the library every few months to check out an iPad kit so that they could participate in an online focus group. The project with KRH is complete and we now have 14 additional iPads and hotspots that are available for use by our patrons that they donated to the library.

I am currently working with Sam and LMT to come up with ideas on how best to use these devices that will be of the most benefit to our patrons. With the demand of our Tech Connect devices being so high, it will be great to add these additional devices to help ease the demand.

I want to say a big thanks to everyone for chipping in wherever and whenever needed. We are short staffed on the Customer Experience Team and in Collection Services and everyone is working hard to try to make ends meet. Thanks to everyone for helping cover desk shifts when needed and thanks to library advisors for helping out with shelving whenever they have a free moment. I greatly appreciate the team atmosphere from all staff and I know our patrons appreciate it too!

Communications

LUNE AXELSEN, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

The Communications team has been busy this past month getting the community engaged with ImagineIF's summer programming. Working with the Youth Services team, we've selected a topic from the Summer Experience guidebooks to post about on Facebook and Instagram each week. The Communications team shared challenges from the adult guidebook to get people outdoors, involved in the community or to simply get creative, while YS shared ideas and challenges from the little learners, kids and teens guidebooks. As a result, participants are sharing their work and experiences with us on Facebook and Instagram.

This week I've been working with Charlotte to promote the Stories & Starlight fundraiser for the ImagineIF Foundation. I've scheduled posts on Facebook and Instagram, and posted a Facebook event. I also put together a printable program for the event. It was really wonderful to utilize the beautiful design work Charlotte had created for the event. The programs turned out really beautiful.

The process of updating the language on the new website is taking more time than expected, especially with all of the changes going on at the library this month. It looks like we will be launching the new site next month.

I am preparing to relaunch our Art Exhibit program this fall. I already have 3 shows booked starting in September in Kalispell and Columbia Falls. I will be confirming those shows and updating Art Exhibit procedures this month. It will be exciting to see new artwork in the libraries again!

Social Media Snapshot: The big social media story this month is Stories! The team has made it a goal to increase posting to FB and IG stories this month and it has paid off! Stories are proving to be a useful and easy format to reach more people.

Collections and Branch Services

SEAN ANDERSON, SENIOR LIBRARIAN

It's the first month of a new Fiscal Year, so all of Collection Services has been working on closing out FY21, and sending out new orders for FY22. Alice, Julie, and Natasha deserve specific credit for staying on top of their duties throughout the year, and ensuring that orders were properly received, paid, and processed throughout the year. The end of the fiscal year is always a busy time, but the rollover process seems to go ever more smoothly with each passing year.

The Collection Development Team reviewed budgets and collection performance from the last year. FY21 fell right in the midst of COVID, so we had to make a number of adjustments throughout the year to offer more digital services, while still fulfilling our responsibility to make our materials accessible to everyone, regardless of their ability to use a device or access high-speed internet.

In short, we spent 99.7% of our materials budget, and saw circulation increase from FY20. Digital circulation accounted for most of that growth, increasing 35%, but both Children's and Adult circulation grew as well, about 7% and 1%, respectively. I'll be reporting on more statistics system-wide at the meeting this month.

Ben Mason, one of our Materials Handlers was recently offered a Library Advisor position, and we are super proud of him. We'll certainly miss him as a Materials Handler, but he's a great fit for an advisor role, and will be great to work with in a new capacity.

With Ben moving to a new role, we will soon have 3 open Materials Handler positions. We briefly hired someone for one of the roles, but she resigned shortly after her training period ended. I hope to get these positions filled quickly, but considering the hiring situation across Flathead County, I am concerned about our ability to attract quality candidates. Connie, Teri, and I worked on some analysis of the starting MH wage, and I hope to keep the conversation about Materials Handler wages going with the Board.

A number of facilities issues have also come up in the last month – I won't recount each issue, but the 3 biggest concerns are HVAC systems, hot water, and occupancy limits.

One of the compressors in the AC system in Kalispell failed. This does not immediately affect the temperature in the building, but does put additional strain on the whole system, so I am monitoring it very closely. Johnson Controls has ordered parts to complete the repairs, but are estimating up to 3 months to complete the work, due to supply chain delays.

We still do not have reliable hot water in the 'old' part of the building in Kalispell, due to a broken water heater at SD5. SD5 is actively working on replacing the unit, but Mike installed a 2.5 gallon point-of-service water heater in the meantime.

It was brought to our attention that our buildings did not have occupancy numbers posted, so Tony and I have been working with the various municipalities to assess the spaces and get accurate occupancy numbers. Columbia Falls' limit is 64 people, and Kalispell has a maximum of 194 (108 on the 1st floor, 86 on the 2nd floor). Bigfork is unincorporated, so that inspection is scheduled for later this month with the Deputy State Fire Marshal.

JULY 22, 2021

ALICE EBI, COLLECTION SERVICES LIBRARIAN

On Friday July 2 we celebrated with the Materials Handlers on their excellent work in the last few months. We have a great team of dedicated workers.

Rollover was completed July 7. We are now ordering for FY 2022.

We have 2 open Materials Handler positions again. During the last hiring cycle we offered 2 candidates a position. One turned it down. The other trained for 2 weeks and then resigned. We will have another open position on July 26 when our Materials Handler Ben Mason moves up to the open Library Advisor position.

We offer our congratulations to Ben for this career move. We are glad he will still be part of the ImagineIF team!

With summer in full swing several of our volunteers are on vacation. We have one person interested in joining us. I will be contacting her soon to set up an appointment.

DEIDRE MCMULLIN, BIGFORK MANAGER

This month we added extra seating because we know that many people come to the library to escape from the heat. On many occasions this week we had to get creative with the seating we have to accommodate all of the people who visited. We usually have two laptops and a desktop Mac computer (which was donated by Bigfork Rotary) but if necessary we can pull from the Tech Connect items for in building use if they haven't been checked out. Seating can be trickier when many people are using the library at the same time, since chairs can make browsing or passing by difficult for other patrons.

Some regular patrons haven't been able to visit the library recently because of the heat and lack of nearby parking. I spoke with several of those folks on the phone, partly to check in on them, and partly to make sure they know about our curbside options. One elderly patron told me that she had tried to come down a couple of times but drove home when she couldn't find something close enough to the door. After I explained the curbside option we agreed that Emily and I would find some books she might like and call her for a curbside delivery.

I've loved hearing stories of all the summer exploring and reading kids have been inspired to complete using our Summer Experience kits. After taking her grandchildren on the story walk along the river, one grandma said that she was feeling inspired to make one in her back yard and around her neighborhood.

A couple who have started to become regular patrons mentioned how grateful they are for the library. They specifically said it's "so convenient" because they moved here recently and don't have their home office set up yet, and are having trouble getting internet. They've checked out a hot spot (which worked "perfectly") and used our printer a couple of times.

TONY EDMUNDSON, COLUMBIA FALLS MANAGER

My wife, daughter, and I were on a vacation in mid-June for a family wedding, and in our travels we stopped by many Montana libraries. It was a great opportunity to see how different libraries were handling this stage of the pandemic, to browse spaces, collections, and observe customer service. Out of the many we visited, we all agreed the Glendive Public Library was our favorite. The spaces were bright, the books cheerfully displayed, and their staff were most charming and welcoming. I have sent their Director, Dawn Kingstad, an email letting her know how much we enjoyed our visit.

The Summer Experience Program was in full swing upon my return from vacation. Families have been overjoyed with their summer kits. The day of launch, Monday, June 14, was the busiest day we have had since the beginning of the pandemic, and our daily traffic has stayed steadily higher since then.

Besides an increase in visits related to our summer program, we are also seeing all of the regular summer seasonal employees related to Glacier National Park, and visitors from tourism in general. This increase has especially been apparent in the demand for in-building Wi-Fi, printing, and places to plug in and work, or connect with family. We function for so many as information house, gathering place, remote office, refuge from inclement weather. Even with all of our furniture returned to our spaces, we cannot always meet the needs of our community and our visitors. And with our recent fire inspection revealing a maximum occupancy of 64 people in our library, our space constraints will be an area of focus for myself and our leadership team.

Summer Outdoor Early Literacy Classes have begun! All of our Columbia Falls classes are held at Marantette Park, for which we are very grateful to the City of Columbia Falls. The first class was a great success, bringing in many of our regular patrons and their noticeably taller children, as well as catching some folks who just happened to be enjoying the park and got a wonderful surprise.

Information Technology

SAM CROMPTON, IT COORDINATOR

Useful Public Computers

Public computer use is on a clear upward trajectory again rising from about 1,800 sessions/mth to over 2,800/mth from April thru June. This is necessitating plans to add to the quantity of public computing stations in Columbia Falls and Kalispell in support of peak demand which is growing with our normalized open hours.

The three Useful public computer servers have been updated to their manufacturer's latest software release 10.6.3. This has resolved intermittent problems with printing, event execution and sound volume experienced on the previous software version.

Staff iPad CFalls

Integrated the first 'staff use' iPad into our mobile device management system which allows effective cloud-based control of the device and it's applications. This makes device set up, moves, adds & changes a straightforward IT management task allowing staff to focus on programing vs having to struggle keeping devices up to date and functioning properly. Also, as more iPad devices are needed they can be deployed quickly with a user profile to address their specific use case.

Hotspot Support from MT State Library

The State Library has supported our device lending program since it's inception by providing over 50 hotspots for circulation at no cost to the library. During this time the State's ongoing support has been nothing short of outstanding. Whenever there are questions regarding device performance or changes required to the T-Mobile service the State has been extremely responsive and attentive to anything we need, helping us to continue providing a consistent reliable service to patrons. I've had to replace defective hotspots, temporarily or permanently suspend internet service and without fail the state has quickly and accurately seen that it gets done. Interacting effectively with the hotspot provider T-Mobile, I've found to be no simple task either.

Upgrade to Staff Server OS

Our Windows 2012 Server OS was upgraded to Rel 2 in mid June, with no downtime experienced by staff. The previous version had been extremely stable since 2014 and Microsoft still fully supported it with security updates, however it's become clear that a new upgrade was required as a baseline for transitioning to a more current server OS, i.e. Windows 2016 or 2019 or to enable the option of a different upgrade path, the transfer of server functionality to the cloud via Microsoft Azure. Which route we take is not yet decided, but Windows Server 2012 Rel 2 is the minimum platform required for either of these server evolution paths. The Rel 2 upgrade was provided to the library by Microsoft at no cost as part of their educational facility donation program.

Business Office

TERI DUGAN, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

It's been a flurry of HR related duties the past few weeks, mainly due to retirements, college bound staff and employees relocating. Currently, we are working to fill 3 Materials Handler jobs, one Library Advisor job and one Professional Librarian position. As we work through the hiring timelines for each position, we are reminded that the process of filling our positions takes time and a lot of collaboration on the part of each hiring team.

The final numbers for the last fiscal year are trickling in. I've been busy tracking those expenses and revenue items in an effort to finalize the year end. It often takes one to two months after the close of June to record all the expenses. Utilities and services are calculated to be applied to the month they are used. As much as I would like to wrap up the year and jump right into the new fiscal year, the actual process involves quite a bit of calculations between the two years.

June was busy with vehicle maintenance. Our Honda Odyssey had a broken tail light cover. The dealership was able to order a new piece and install it. While the van was in the shop, it received its scheduled mileage inspection. Our Toyota Prius was due for an oil change and mileage inspection as well. Jennie and I were able to coordinate all the appointments and county shop visits for the month of June. Our courier van just received another recall part notice. We will be scheduling that at the dealership next month some time.