



DIRECTOR AND STAFF REPORT

Martha Furman, Interim Director

Dear Board of Trustees,

Fall is definitely here and we are excited to help our wonderful patrons find things to read, watch or listen to on a cozy evening. This month, I have several updates for you on our progress of hiring staff following several retirements and resignations last month. I also have some notes for you on a materials challenge, the First Amendment, and the process for handling complaints about items in the library.

Current Staffing Picture

Our children's librarian position is open and has a closing date of October 27th. We are looking forward to seeing the applications. In the meantime, our super capable YS staff and new Adult/Teen Services Librarian Starr White are working hard to fill in gaps staffing the desks and running early literacy programs. We are also actively recruiting a custodian (25 hours) and a materials handler (20 hours) for ImagineIF Kalispell. And of course, the Library Director!

The Board's Role in Hiring

I know that Board members may be interested in participating in hiring decisions **beyond hiring the Director**. As a statutory board, you have broad authority, but it is important that you understand best practices as well. As the state library Trustee manual details, the boundaries between staff, Director and Board are important to keep clear and well maintained. I have concerns about Board participation in hiring professional staff. In speaking with our HR department, this is quite rare and has only been done on the Health board a few years ago for a very high ranking Deputy position

The Board will need to consider, as a unit, whether and how to participate in hiring staff. It is my responsibility to ensure that the hiring process is fair and unbiased. The current governing structure that we observe, which keeps hiring of staff separate from Board governance, is based on over 100 years of successful library leadership and Board relations in the state of Montana.

The Board may have concerns that we would hire a librarian who does not understand the community. It is my duty to select and hire candidates who will fit well within the overall team and organizational structure of the library and foster smooth operations. As Interim Director and as a senior staff member with fifteen years of experience serving this community, I am qualified to lead a hiring team to choose professional librarians who are good fit for the organization and will serve the community fairly.

As per Flathead County personnel policy, we have a fair and reasonable hiring practice already in place. It reads:

"Department heads may choose to fill position vacancies internally or through an external competitive process," and "Flathead County will use a fair and consistent competitive selection process that is designed to select the best candidate based on merit and qualifications."

Adding Board members into the hiring process beyond the director could have the following negative effects on the library:

- The chain of command could be diluted and made more confusing for staff, leading to miscommunication, delays due waiting for direction, or staff believing that the Board members have supervisory duties.
- Staff may be distracted by concerns about the Board having too much influence over hiring, leading to rumors, a loss of productivity and extra work for leadership staff in managing staff concerns.
- The Director's ability to do their job effectively in supervising staff could be compromised if the Board recommends hiring a librarian who is not a good fit.
- Adding Board members means hiring of professional staff could be slowed down considerably, leading to staffing shortages and service interruptions. County Administrator Pete Melnick has asked department heads to expedite hiring wherever possible so that candidates are not lost to other businesses or organizations.

These effects could have far reaching consequences to the taxpayer. For that reason, I do not recommend that the Board of Trustees extend its hiring powers beyond the Director. It is my job to serve this community fairly and I take this responsibility seriously.

Freedom of speech and the library

Last week I received a formal challenge to a book in our collection, Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe. We will be following the process laid out in our Collection Management Policy 5000 to handle this complaint. This policy helps the library uphold its responsibility to protect the First Amendment and the right to free speech as guaranteed by the Montana State Constitution.

The formal process is as follows:

"If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant will be asked to fill out and return a written and signed Citizen Comment on Library Materials Form. This form may be obtained from any Imagine!F staff member. In the absence of a fully completed form there is no formal complaint and no action will be taken. After the library director has received a fully completed written complaint, she or he shall establish a review committee to investigate the complaint. The committee's recommendation is then presented to the Library Board of Trustees for a final decision."

In working through challenges to materials, it's helpful to remember a few things. First, as staff and Trustees, we do not defend a specific work, but rather the public's right to access protected speech. It's our role and duty to protect an individual's right to access the work and the freedom make up their own minds. Also, we protect the complainant's right to free speech by providing the Citizen Comment form as a way to express concerns about library materials.

Most speech (including the written, spoken, and visual works held in the library) is protected by the First Amendment, and therefore removing a work from the library would be a violation of library patron's rights to free speech. Removal of a book or other library material could put the Board at risk of a lawsuit.

When working on the issue of library collections including questions about selection and removal, I typically hear a few similar concerns. Most often, concerned patrons want to know about our policy, how books are chosen for the library, and how we keep harmful materials away from children.

Why does the Library have a Collection Management Policy and what does it do?

Public libraries in the United States have the following responsibilities:

- Library staff have the duty to protect the public's First Amendment rights from being infringed upon by government influence.
- Fulfilling this responsibility requires neutral, trained library professionals managing the acquisitions process in a fair and unbiased way.
- Library staff recognize and communicate to the public that a balanced collection will have materials some will deem offensive or unacceptable. Constitutionally protected speech must remain available per the First Amendment, allowing people the freedom to choose for themselves. The Board of Trustees works with library staff to develop a Collection Management policy that is fair and neutral

How are materials selected?

Professional librarians have a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science. While obtaining their degree, they take at least one semester-long course, and sometimes several subject matter courses, on collection management. These classes cover organizational models for managing collections; planning, policy and budgeting; developing collections - including how to fairly and neutrally select materials; managing collections; marketing and outreach; collection analysis including evaluation and assessment; and cooperative collection development and resource sharing among libraries.

The library uses industry-specific wholesale vendors to supply the books, DVDs and audiobooks for the collections. Library staff also use a variety of tools, metrics and collection statistics to predict popularity and demand for certain titles, as well as professional reviews to gauge quality, popularity and community interest. Library staff strive to provide a broad selection of materials to satisfy the diverse needs of the community, and use the following selection criteria to guide their decisions.

- Customer demand and interest
- Critical reviews
- Presentation and readability
- To balance of all sides of an issue
- Author's reputation and significance as a writer
- Reputation and standing of the publisher
- Local or national significance
- Availability of the material or information elsewhere
- Quality of the physical format
- Reasonable cost

How do you protect children?

We would never want to take away a parent's freedom or right to protect their children. That is why we rely on parental supervision for their children's library use. Because all families are different, every parent or guardian has the right to choose for their own family what is appropriate. Parents can always see what their child has checked out on their library card by bringing it to the library, calling us with the card number, or logging in online.

Our staff is available to research whether a title will fit a parent's requirements, and we always recommend that parents read a book first before giving it to a child.

This is only a brief introduction to freedom of speech as it pertains to libraries, but it is our role and duty every day. The library offers open and unfettered access to its books and materials in order to ensure that Americans continue to enjoy their very important and treasured freedom. The freedom to choose for oneself is a time-tested tradition and part of the heritage of this country.

Warm regards,

Martha Furman
Interim Director

Operations, Public Services, Communications

YOUTH SERVICES LIBRARIAN - Position Vacant



STARR WHITE, TEEN & ADULT SERVICES LIBRARIAN

Greetings people of Flathead County! My name is Starr White and I am humbled and happy to introduce myself as your new Teen & Adult Services Librarian. I look forward to meeting everyone over the coming months.

A bit about myself: four-year old Starr wanted to be a storytime librarian. When I was 11 years old, I started volunteering for West Charleston Library and, at 15, I was hired as a materials handler. I spent four years with West Charleston Library and left for academic pursuits. My first academic passion was science, obtaining an Associates in both Biotechnology and Medical Laboratory Science. Unfortunately, and in many ways fortunately, my undergraduate program in clinical laboratory science was cut. I decided that four-year old Starr had a point and I turned to library science. I obtained my Bachelor of Arts in Library Science and Media from Ashford University while working at Paseo Verde Library. Shortly after obtaining my BA, I became the sole employee in the Youth Services Department at Kingman Branch Library. Having fallen wholly in love with public libraries, I pursued my Master's degree in Library Science at the University of North Texas, which I completed last December.

I'm eager and thrilled to share my talents with ImagineIF Libraries! Getting to know the outstanding library staff and meeting the many amazing patrons has been my honor and focus. I've also spent time becoming familiar with the history, library operations, policies, procedures, and strategic plan of ImagineIF Libraries.

Know that my door is always open. I'll also be working frequently at the Youth Services desk, so please stop by, introduce yourself and say "hi."

OCTOBER 21, 2021

KAT WILSON, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE LIBRARIAN

I am just starting my second week back at work after being gone for a month due to a family emergency, so I don't have much to report. I am still trying to catch up and get back into the swing of things. I do want to say a VERY BIG thank you to everyone who helped cover shifts and anything else that came up while I was gone. It was so nice to know that our wonderful and very capable staff had everything covered and taken care of!

A big welcome to Starr White, our new Adult Services/Teen Services Librarian!!! We are so excited to have her on board and I am so excited to start to work with her. She has definitely had to hit the ground running since we have been so short staffed, but is catching on quickly and doing an amazing job. Welcome, Starr!



Communications

LUNE AXELSEN, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

- Our new art exhibits have drawn excitement from staff and patrons who say the bright imagery in Kalispell and Columbia Falls has been a welcome change of scenery. The press release I sent out last month about the new art shows paid off. The Flathead Beacon wrote an article about Rocky Hoerner's "Timeless Montana" exhibit in Kalispell, documenting Rocky's career in Montana as an artist and reminding readers to come see his exhibit at ImagineIF.
- In addition, this week we are featuring another art installation, a Día de los Muertos exhibit in Kalispell by local artist Johnny Skinner. This traditional display serves as a cultural expression of Mexican and Latino cultural heritage and allows observants to connect with their departed loved ones and to honor their ancestry. This exhibit will be on display from October 20th to November 6th. I will be drafting a press release about the exhibit this week. We are excited to showcase this authentic work to the community and inspire patrons to explore cultural diversity through our collections and materials.
- Library card sign-up month was a success! We gave out ImagineIF tote bags for every new card sign-up and promoted this campaign on social media. The results were good. In the 8 months prior to September, our average card sign-ups at all locations was 311 cards per month. We had 429 card sign-ups in September, which is an increase of 38%! Additionally, September 2021 saw an 85% increase in card sign-ups compared to 2020's average of 232 card sign-ups per month!
- We also offered free ImagineIF tote-bags to those who joined our email list during Library Card Sign-up month. This was a great incentive for existing card holders and allowed us to grow our email audience. We received 26 new subscribers during September, which is a 420% increase compared to our average monthly sign up of 5 subscribers a month. Good job team!
- I began working on layout this week for the Foundation Annual Report. I anticipate completed artwork by the end of the month.
- After working closely with our website team and Haybale Designs, our new website is ready to go live on November 1st. We finalized a few new features this month that allow us to better tell the library's story, streamline the user experience, and reach more patrons online. I am excited to begin using the new site full-time!
- **Social Media Snapshot:** We're seeing a slow but steady increase in our Facebook following, but our Instagram following has flattened this month. I've concluded that we're not only posting content that our Instagram audience is not interested in, but posting too frequently, which will affect the Instagram algorithm for post placement. At our next communications meeting we will evaluate what is performing and cutting what is not. The good news is our Instagram and Facebook stories performance is through the roof! So we are reaching a lot of patrons using this new medium.

Social Media Stats:

- **Facebook:** 23 new Page Likes this period (1% increase in the last 30 days)
- **Instagram:** -2 new followers this period (.1% decrease in the last 30 days)
- **YouTube:** 3 new subscriber this period (2% increase in the last 30 days)
- **Website** 19,154 page views this period (5% increase in the last 30 days)
- **IG Story Reach:** 3284 IG Story views this month (59% increase in monthly views in last 28 days)
- **FB Story:** 620 Unique Opens this month (15% increase in last 28 days)

Collections and Branch Services

SEAN ANDERSON, SENIOR LIBRARIAN

In the last month, we have welcomed several new staff to the team: Starr White, Adult/Teen Services Librarian; Joshua Braach, Materials Handler; and Madeline Wilcox, Materials Handler. We were also able to make many of the administrative changes to increase Materials Handler and Courier wages, new position postings, and Lead Worker Status for Chris Cunningham. I am extremely grateful to Martha for her guidance in restructuring wages, and to Teri for her expertise in making these changes so quickly.

With these changes in effect, I feel positive about sustaining a team of Materials Handlers into the future. I have started training with Chris on some of his new Lead Worker duties, and he has taken well to the leadership role. Staff at all levels already recognize his deep knowledge, so I expect the transition to go smoothly. Chris and I will continue to work together on any changes to procedures in the department, but I trust him very much with supervising the day-to-day operations.

In addition to training Chris to supervise Materials Handlers, I have also been working with Julie and Natasha to restructure their duties as Collection Services Advisors. Without a dedicated Collection Services Librarian, I have delegated several ongoing responsibilities to them – submitting completed orders to vendors, managing the flow of discarded items, and routinely updating procedural documents. Kat Wilson will also be helping out with cataloging duties, as well as selection of Adult Fiction materials. Both of these tasks will require extensive training, but I trust Kat will learn quickly.

With these changes in motion, I believe that we will be able to continue with most of the regular duties of the Collection Services Department, but the changes are not without consequence. I am working to resign my position as Chair of the MSC Executive Committee at the end of the year, and I can no longer commit to projects for the Partners Sharing group. In recent years, my involvement with these groups have simplified and standardized Acquisitions procedures for MSC Libraries, streamlined cataloging policies, and created a sustainable cost-sharing model for collaborative library services. While both groups will of course continue, I regret having to leave these leadership roles.

Similarly, the turnover among the management team has forced me to temporarily de-prioritize many of my selection, collection development, and data-collection duties. In the absence of a Library Director, much of Starr's orientation and training has fallen to me, and in the absence of an Assistant Director, I am helping Martha and Lune with internal communication. I am also training and scheduling 4 newly hired Materials Handlers, and helping to troubleshoot staff schedules for other departments. I am happy to fill these roles because they are crucial to library operations. I mention it to the board because any delays in the hiring process, particularly for leadership positions, are felt directly by staff, myself included.

I have also been working closely with Martha on the recent challenge to the book Gender Queer, by a member of the community. Responding to this challenge will rightfully occupy a lot of staff energy in the coming months, including my own. A book challenge is a critically important and sometimes difficult responsibility, and one that we take extremely seriously. Martha will address this with the board more completely, but I view this as a necessary test of this library's Collection Development policy, and I look forward to the work.

Sean Anderson, cont'd

Mike Cartee, our custodian, retired at the beginning of October. Ron Cantu will temporarily be working 23 additional hours per week (for a total of 40 hours) in order to stay on top of maintenance, cleaning and sanitizing our spaces. We are planning to post a 25-hour Custodian position, and increase Ron's permanent hours to 32 per week. The personnel committee had expressed some interest in contracting with a janitorial company for regular cleaning duties, and Flathead Janitorial responded to a request for a quote. Cleaning bathrooms and mopping entryways 3 days per week would cost approximately \$1,400 per month – nearly \$4,000 per year more expensive than our current arrangement.

A final note of thanks to the staff at Lincoln County Libraries. After seeing our recent backlog of 200+ Partners crates, Alyssa Ramirez offered to send her staff from Libby to help check items in. From late-September through early-October, 2 staff travelled to Kalispell for 10 hours per week to help us catch up. As a result, we are currently sitting at a "normal" crate count of ~60 crates. Thanks to their generosity, our users are receiving holds nearly 2 full weeks sooner than they were in September. Thanks to Alyssa and her team for the assistance – it speaks to the culture of collaboration and good will that defines Montana library services.

DEIDRE MCMULLIN, BIGFORK MANAGER

Early literacy classes at Lake Baked in downtown Bigfork have continued to attract at least a dozen participants despite the chillier weather. This location is so lovely, and this program is so valuable to families of young children. Preschoolers are able to prepare for school with early literacy skills, and parents can connect with other parents and build community connections. Most families have been combining the classes with a visit to the library after for book checkouts.

The library also continues to fill the role of open space for community members. Children and parents use the space for supervised visits. Families on hikes on the Swan River trail or other outings will arrange to meet elderly parents later at the library. The elder family members have a warm place to sit and read, or even just sit for a bit.

Aside from checking out books, DVDs, and magazines, many patrons consider the library their go-to place for printing and other technology help. In a single day I have helped patrons print hunter training certificates, access eBooks on a device, print tax forms, print resumes, and recover their email accounts. For many people these tasks are simple, but for others they are intimidating and frustrating. People appreciate having somewhere to turn for non-judgmental drop-in help.

TONY EDMUNDSON, COLUMBIA FALLS MANAGER

- The Columbia Falls Chamber Education Committee hosted a Freshman Career Day at the high school, the first we've had since 2019. I was invited to run a teamwork station with a partner, Tyler Ladenburg from OrthoRehab. We settled on a team building challenge, that of stacking cups with a very stringent rule set and a lot of fun. This event provided me the opportunity to share my knowledge of teamwork and my joy of leading challenges to the entire freshman class of nearly 200 students.
- On October 12 I attended the first in-person Columbia Falls Chamber Luncheon since the beginning of the pandemic. Our topic was childcare in the Flathead Valley as relates to the workforce. We heard from Lorraine Clarno, President and CEO of the Kalispell Chamber, and Kate McMahon of Applied Communications. Between these organizations, Kalispell Job Service, and FVCC a focus group has been established to determine how we can address this very real issue for recruiting and retaining employees. A summary report should be available in November, followed by the groups recommended plan of action in December. Considering our own role in job assistance in the library, and our Path Finder partnership with Job Service, I'm interested to see the outcome of the focus group's work and how we can be of assistance.



Information Technology

SAM CROMPTON, IT COORDINATOR

Tech Connect Device Management

Hotspots continue to be very popular and their management, although time consuming, is working well for both the State provided and library owned devices. The State library responds quickly and has been supportive of our requests for changes to hotspots as necessary, which helps keep as many devices as possible available to patrons. Also, the recently separated Surface Go 2 kits has freed up hotspots to help address patron demand for internet service only check-outs. The Surface Go 2 devices will be reallocated for staff or potentially in-library patron use. This allows the library to keep circulated kits consistent in favor of iPads. The iPad devices integrate well into our management system providing better control of updates, apps and when necessary deactivation of a device.

Public Computer Stations – Kalispell

Patron demand for public computing stations continues to be strong during peak times. Although we could quickly re-establish the additional six stations previously deployed, distancing limitations and staff safety concerns requires the number of stations to be limited to four on the 2nd floor at this time. Patrons are either waiting or more likely leaving to hopefully return during less busy times.

Marion Wireless Internet

CenturyLink installed a new internet service in Marion to replace the previous MT Sky DSL which had become unreliable. It took CenturyLink about three weeks to do something they typically can do in three business days, resulting in order processing frustration and no library wireless service during that time, however, I estimate it to have affected only about 30 wireless sessions, due to not having library public hours most of that time. After not having to visit our Marion location for several years, I'm happy to report that patron wireless internet service is available again serving the Marion community, as well, the wireless self-check is updated and functional for patrons and students.

Public Computer & Network Power Backup

Installed new battery backup UPS equipment at all three library locations. This equipment is important to keep current and functional because it protects the public computer servers as well as networking equipment at each location, helping to isolate any damaging power surges before then can harm the equipment. It also provides a level of standby power which can help when brief outages occur.

Lakeside Self Check

After reports of self-check issues at our station in the Lakeside library, that unit has been updated with the most current system and application software to bring it back online, with remote control functionality added. The operating system upgrade was allowed by Microsoft at no additional cost to ImagineiF.

IT Conference

Attended virtually the 2021 Spiceworks IT web conference, Spiceworld2021. This online conference brings together solution provider vendors with a major emphasis on IT security. The breadth and scope of bad actors attempting to disrupt, destroy and steal network data is extremely pervasive. Library networks aren't high priority targets, however it's a daily risk that malicious software could find it's way into our network potentially causing major downtime for staff and patrons, impacting services to the public. The ideas presented during the conference provided an understanding of how large and small companies are prioritizing security initiatives and can help us further strengthen our network defenses.

Website Hosting

Renewed and installed our website SSL certificate through our hosting provider Network Solutions. These certificates are important as a security best practice for patrons visiting the library website. The certificates are reasonably priced and valid for 24 months at which time they'll need to be renewed again.

Computer Monitors

Was able to redeploy six spare library computer monitors to other County departments for their use, resulting in a great alternative to the normal recycling exercise.

Business Office

TERI DUGAN, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Today marks 10 years for me with the library! As I write this director's report, I can't help but reflect upon my time here at the library. After a quick look at our current roster of 35 employees, I see 7 staff that were here when I began my library career. I began as a Library Advisor (then called a Library Technician) working 17 hours a week!

The last few weeks have been filled to the brim with administrative tasks related to library staff restructuring, re-hiring and pay grade changes. These changes have helped bring wage increases to many of our employees. We are currently advertising a full time Children's Librarian and a part time Materials Handler position. We are working hard to post a part time custodial position as well. The hiring process from start to finish can take on average about two months. It's a great help to work with our county Human Resource department all along the way to get the job done and the procedure boxes all checked!

I'm working with Martha in scheduling meeting room requests. So far, we've been able to help homeschooling groups, the chess club, the Friends book club and a clarinet practice duo use the facilities. We are working on a plan to have the meeting room available for reservations online when the new website is launched. In the meantime, requests taken from customers via phone and in person.

The days are busy. Routine work like paying the bills and processing payroll never stops. I don't mind full days at all and am grateful to have meaningful work. I've been especially missing our courier, Jennie who is out on temporary leave. Those courier tasks have been divided up among many of us for the time being. The team has been so helpful in stepping up to getting the job done. The teamwork we have at the library is exemplary!

