Stephanie White brings balance to Central Library

As the “person in charge” (PIC) coordinator at Central Library, Stephanie White works to achieve a delicate balance. “Every day, our goal is to ensure access,” she says. “But ‘welcome’ looks different to every population, so I work closely with our patrons to see how the library can be welcoming for everyone.”

To help achieve this goal, Stephanie aligns the work of 17 Central Library PIC staff members with the individual needs and circumstances of the nearly 13,000 people who visit the historic downtown building every week. All libraries have a person in charge on duty during every open hour. Those staff members interpret and apply library rules, address building maintenance needs, respond to medical emergencies and make numerous other decisions to keep the library safe and welcoming. Stephanie also serves as a scheduler, an advisor, a
problem solver and one of the primary trainers for the library's safety and security program.

Stephanie joined the library in 2016 after an 18-year career at Powell's City of Books. As a manager there, she had similar duties, but she points to a fundamental difference regarding the library's end goal: access.

Like all library staff, PICs look for every way to help deliver patrons what they need — a “think yes” model to customer service. “While my role requires addressing security concerns and applying the library rules, I focus on ways to help people use the library successfully. Interactions shouldn't be punitive. They should feel like a collaboration between patrons and staff to help the library be welcoming and safe. It requires being part of the fabric of daily library life and doing many other things beyond applying rules — it means relationship building,” she says.

In the past two years, the library has expanded safety and security efforts, including adding a new category of library safety officers; creating new training curricula for staff; adopting a new model of PIC staffing; and revising library rules significantly for the first time in decades. To Stephanie, those rules are much more than a list of “don'ts.”

“It's not just about the content of the rules to ensure a welcoming environment; the rules were reworked to make them easier to apply equitably. That's our goal — apply library rules as consistently as possible to ensure fairness and equity. We all need to be on the same page to get there.”

For some library patrons, the library is a place of safety and refuge from the pressures and danger of living outside. Stephanie says she came to understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness differently than before she worked in the library. She talks about learning of the idea of “prosocial” behavior (as opposed to its antonym, antisocial, which is more common and familiar). In Stephanie's role, she sees opportunity to help people whose situations compromise their ability to be prosocial.

“While I considered myself compassionate and empathetic, I just didn't have the tools to understand the minute-to-minute struggles people experiencing homelessness encounter every day,” Stephanie says. “If I had to think constantly about where I was going to use a bathroom, charge my phone, get something to eat, or avoid people stealing my things or assaulting me, I don't know how long my own prosocial skills would last.”
It doesn't take long to discover Stephanie's ability to make positive and lasting connections with people. Colleagues are quick to praise her abilities and approach. She reciprocates those sentiments. “The well of thoughtfulness here is infinite,” she says. “The library system is so large, yet people at every level are so thoughtful about how we meet the needs of various communities, though our perspectives are all different. We all have very job-focused goals in addition to creating a welcoming environment. The intersection of all that is the most fascinating and challenging part of this job for me.”

When she's not at work, Stephanie enjoys the solitude of being outdoors and the company of her rottweiler/shepherd/pitbull mix, Jackson (he's a good boy). She also loves to spend time in a warm kitchen, refining her techniques for the perfect pie crust or souffle. Like her work, those efforts are an intricate exercise in achieving just the right balance.

Library wins age-friendly business award

Multnomah County Library has received an Age-Friendly Business Award for business practices that demonstrate the value of older adults.

The award — given by Age-Friendly Advisory Council of Portland and Multnomah County, Elders in Action and Venture Portland — recognizes the many free and easy options, materials and services the library offers older patrons.

This includes some 20,000 large-print books, delivery and telephone services for the homebound, pop-up libraries in senior living facilities, and abundant volunteer opportunities. More than 350 library volunteers are 50 or older! The library also provides dozens of programs and performances relevant to older adults each month.
Programming & Outreach Director Katie O'Dell and Library Outreach Specialist Jere White accepted the award on behalf of the library. “While Jere and I were talking with people after the event,” said Katie, “we met the Elders in Action volunteer who handcrafted the awards and learned he is also an MCL Makerspace volunteer who made the awards at the Makerspace! Really great circle of community connection.”

Pictured: County Commissioner Sharon Meieran with Katie and Jere.

First annual PDX Native Film Night helps people ‘shift the narrative’

Multnomah County Library was happy to kick-off our month long celebration of Native American Heritage with PDX (Pretty Damn Xtraordinary) Native Film Night at the Hollywood Theatre. The library's programming team partnered with Hollywood Theatre, Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, and Native American Youth and Family Center to host this event. Over 175 people attended this program at the Hollywood Theatre on Thursday, November 1.
Why is it important to feature Indigenous stories in film in media? “It helps people feel more like people and shift the narrative of the Western canon of literature and stories,” says Anthony Hudson, Hollywood Theatre’s lead programmer.

This evening of film featured a screening of an episode of the PBS series, Native America, called *Nature of Nations*. It also included with Native American-made film shorts like *Missing Indigenous*, a local award-winning short directed and produced by an all Native American cast and crew. This event also included a panel discussion with Grand Ronde artist, Anthony Hudson, Yankton Sioux/Navajo writer, Jacqueline Keeler, and founder of DisOrient Film Festival Jason Cummings.

The library continued the celebration of Native American Heritage with performances, arts & craft workshops, lectures and more throughout the county during the month of November.

All Native American Heritage Month programs are made possible by The Library Foundation through support from The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Fund. The library thanks both organizations for their vision in connecting people and culture through the public library.

**Library staff recommend the best books of 2018**

All year long library staff have been nominating their favorite titles, and [The Best Books of 2018](#) is now live, just in time for the holidays. Composed of an array of over 200 glorious book covers, readers can float over titles with a mouse to find out why we think the book in question is simply one of the best of 2018. Play with the side tabs to explore graphic novels for kids, diverse voices in teen literature, or memoir for adults. The Best Books service also makes it easy to share promising titles with friends through social media. If you're just looking to add to your “to be read” or are searching for the perfect gift book, there’s something for everyone on the Best Books page.

**New local music now streaming on library website**

[New local music is now streaming](#) on the library's website. The music was submitted to the Library Music Project, an online platform that showcases and shares current local music for free. In this second submission round, local music experts and library staff reviewed 80 submissions. More than 35 new albums are now featured on the library’s website. Anyone can stream the music, and library cardholders may also download and keep the music.
Adult literacy tutors provide hope

*By guest contributor and library volunteer Donna Childs*

Imagine being an adult and unable to read — how frustrated, embarrassed, even fearful you might feel. While it could seem overwhelming to enroll in school, a drop-in session with a nonjudgmental adult, one-on-one, at whatever level you need might be the perfect solution. At five Multnomah County libraries, about 80 dedicated, intelligent, good-humored, and joyful volunteer tutors help with reading, English language learning, GED preparation and other skills. The *adult literacy program*, begun 10 years ago through Library Outreach Services, provides walk-in tutoring two hours a week at Central, Gresham, Midland, North Portland and St. Johns libraries. A *recent Oregonian article* explored what this program means to people in our community.

I met with four of the 20 Midland volunteer tutors (*pictured above: Lynn Alderman, Katie Booker, Melissa Madenski and Zarina Jackson*). While tutors come with different backgrounds and skills, they are flexible, and their approach is completely learner-centered. As Melissa said, it isn't teaching first grade; it is finding out what each person knows and building on that. Katie agreed, pointing out that the learners often know more than they think they do.
After all, they may have navigated a lifetime without reading. The key is to discover their interests and what they are good at, to make them comfortable, and to increase their confidence.

Coordinator Lisa Regimbal, the only paid staff member, runs the program, and matches available tutors and learners at each session. The tutors like the variety and not knowing what to expect each week. According to Lynn, that variety keeps her on her toes and allows her to learn too. A former accountant, who has “wanted to do this all my life,” Lynn found this program online.

Katie, too, long wanted to do this; she had considered special education before studying art history and working in insurance. She loves seeing the excitement at the moment someone starts to understand. For example, a sixty-five-year-old man came in wanting to write a letter. After being shown the format, writing the words, folding the paper, addressing and stamping the envelope, he “was so happy” with his new knowledge.

A former adult literacy coordinator, Melissa ran the program for its first five years. The library got a grant, surveyed the needs in the community, reached out to nonprofits, and recruited 40 volunteers. When she retired, Melissa continued as a volunteer tutor. “I love volunteering; I love this work and the excitement of being ready for anything.” Although she can do any kind of tutoring, she, like Katie, most enjoys helping beginning readers.

Zarina, on the other hand, loves English language tutoring. She can take on speakers of any language. Having approached a vocational counselor to find a volunteer career, and exploring several possibilities, the counselor asked what Zarina wanted to be when she grew up. Her instant reply: “an English teacher!” She now happily helps non-English speaking patrons, finding it “an honor to be able to help people.”

The tutors not only form relationships with patrons, with whom they work closely, but they also have a warm camaraderie among themselves. They keep folders on their work so any tutor can help if one of them is absent. They laugh a lot and all agree that although they are there to help others, “we are the ones who benefit most.”

**Four fast facts**

- The library offers large-print book clubs at retirement centers, sponsored by the Friends of the Library.
- Each week, the library's volunteer readers read to small groups of residents at assisted living and Alzheimer's facilities.
The library’s outreach services team can recommend books and place holds for homebound adults by phone at 503.988.5404.

The library can mail books and other materials to homebound adults for free.

**Patron comments**

A patron gave feedback to a staff member about the library's [Overdrive section featuring books by transgender people](#). The staff member recounts what they said: “As a member of the LGBT community, they are really grateful to see this. Voices from this community are so often not lifted up. It makes them proud to be a member of the community and a patron of the library. They will be sharing this with their friends.” —November 2018

“I LOVE MY LIBRARY! Yeah, I've taken out my fair share of DVDs, but I've also asked you to dig up books for me, and I've learned to do some useful stuff with my library access to Lynda.com, and I just ordered a few journal articles, one from the 70s, through interlibrary loan ... late on a Saturday afternoon ... and two of them posted to my account within a couple of hours. How cool is that? Rock on!” —Lowrey, November 2018

**In the news**

[Accessible Arts 3: streaming sounds](#) (Oregon ArtsWatch, November 27)

[The Library Foundation works to make sure everybody reads: Season of Sharing 2018](#) (The Oregonian/OregonLive, November 25)

**Upcoming events**

- **A Midsummer Night at the Savoy**
  December 15
  Central Library

- **The Story of Ebenezer Scrooge**
  December 19
  Woodstock Library

- **Author Visit: Joyce Cherry Creswell**
  December 21
  Rockwood Library

- **The Green Bird, A Mexican Story**
  December 21
  North Portland Library

- **Take-Apart Mechanic**
  Various dates and libraries

- **Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture**
  December 29
  North Portland Library