Message from the President

First, let me say that I’m honored to serve as Connecticut Library Association president this year. I’m very much looking forward to working with the executive board and CLA members to tackle challenges and take advantage of opportunities to move our organization and all CT libraries forward.

As the year begins, committees and sections are already busy working on a variety of endeavors, including planning upcoming fall professional development opportunities. From customer service to technical and children’s services, there is a workshop of interest for everyone. Please take advantage of these low-cost sessions to meet new people, network with peers and gain valuable skills and ideas.

The recently adopted 2019-2020 budget relies on fundraising much more so than it has in past years. Professional library organizations in other states have been actively raising funds for years to help offset expenses. We’re presently seeking someone to chair the grants/fundraising committee. If you or anyone you know might be interested in serving in this capacity, please contact me. It will be an important role this year, and in the future.

At its August meeting, the executive board approved the establishment of the CLA Legacy Fund, created in partnership with the newly formed group of past CLA presidents, which will help the sustainability of our organization. This fund will provide one scholarship to a first time annual CLA conference attendee, fund scholarships for those advancing professional degrees in the library and information science field, fund professional enhancement grants (PEG) and may also be used to fund expenses key to the mission of the Connecticut Library Association. Maxine Bleiweis will be generously matching each donation made to the CLA Legacy Fund before Dec. 31, 2019. I’ll be making a donation, and I hope you will, too.

The legislative committee, in collaboration with the region representatives, will be holding town hall sessions in each of the regions September through November. Please take the time to attend and to share your thoughts and concerns. Encourage your colleagues to do the same so CLA can better understand and support your needs. We’re very interested in what you have to say. The information gathered through these sessions will be used to draft this year’s legislative agenda. We want it to be a message for which we all feel positive advocating.

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Tell us about your professional journey that led you to be the new director of Bridgeport Public Library. Did you always know you wanted to be a librarian?

Growing up, I visited my neighborhood library often. I loved to read. My most favorite book to read until I fell asleep was any random volume of the World Book Encyclopedia, so, I guess I was preparing myself to be a librarian without even realizing it. In my junior year at Hunter College in New York City, one of my classmates had just gotten promoted to a library assistant within the music division of the Performing Arts Research Library at Lincoln Center and he recommended me for his former position as a page. I loved it! I was later selected to work on processing a collection of jazz negatives, making the photographs accessible to the public. I was surrounded by musicians who were also librarians, and an absolutely wonderful collection of books, photographs, clippings, and sheet music, so it was very natural for me to go to library school.

In library school, I was the library student intern at the Center for Photography, another great experience. In my career, I have weaved in and out of the public and private sector, always staying close to libraries and education. I’ve been a freelance photographer, a stock photo agent, an academic librarian, and library director. I also taught English for ten years at Touro College in New York City as an adjunct instructor. I began my career in public libraries in West Haven, where I managed the Ora Mason Branch for seven years. I went on to serve as assistant director in Mount Vernon but that position lasted only one year and then I decided to pursue a dream of mine: a masters in music education. I studied at the University of Bridgeport, and while interviewing for teaching positions, I also expressed interest in Bridgeport Public Library’s search for a city librarian, becoming Interim city librarian in August of 2018. I actually had the difficult task of choosing between teaching strings at a performing arts magnet school and this position. It was a tough decision, but I think I made the right one.

What are some of the favorite parts of your job? Challenges?

My most favorite part of my job is working with staff. I did a lot of listening to my staff when I started as Interim; they had a lot to say. I enjoy identifying talent among my staff and allowing opportunities for them to grow as we serve the public. One of my biggest challenges right now is balancing the day-to-day needs of managing a multi branch library system with the needs of our many construction projects. We just opened our East side Branch in earlier this year and plan a second phase of renovation, our Newfield Branch is nearing completion, and we have two other locations in the planning stages. I am grateful that my staff shares my enthusiasm for transforming lives and communities. It is so much of what we are about these days.

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Save the date for the annual conference, “Setting Our Sights on Success,” to take place April 26-28, 2020, at the Mystic Marriott. As a new addition to the conference, we’ll be adding a two-and-a-half day “storytime school” workshop, targeted at staff members who are relatively new to children’s programming and looking to develop their skills. Storytime School is created and presented by Avon Public Library’s children and teen services manager, Kari Ann St. Jean. Stay tuned for more conference details.

CLA is your state library association and has been connecting library workers, providing professional development and advocating for and advancing libraries since 1875. It is member-driven, so can only thrive with the membership and engagement of the Connecticut library community. Please renew your membership and encourage your colleagues to join. Interested in getting more involved? There truly is a role for everyone!

Contact me at lkarim@simsburylibrary.info or 860-658-7663 ext 2103 or Vice President Tom Piezzo attpiezzo@brainerdlibrary.org or 860-345-2204 if you’d like more information.

We’d love to have you!

What accomplishments are you most proud of?
I am most proud of my involvement with improving library facilities. I wrote the initial plan and grant that got the ball rolling for a new elevator and other improvements at my former branch in West Haven. I also wrote a library construction grant to bring needed modernization to the elevator at Mount Vernon’s library. Facilities were not a big topic when I went to library school, but I have come to realize how much librarians need to know about proper facilities management. Fortunately, discussions are trending towards building libraries for the digital age, but at the core, you need sound, well-thought out structures that are maintained properly.

What do you see in Bridgeport PL’s future?
I see a library system that is responsive to the needs of the communities and neighborhoods we serve, balancing new technologies and traditional services. I see more educational opportunities for residents of all ages, whether it be for gaining skills for employment or finding that first job, starting a small business, promoting early literacy, enhancing educational and cultural experiences for youth or learning how to stay healthy and happy in these stressful times. I see Bridgeport Public Library as a gathering place for community, collaboration and creation.

What books are on your "to be read" pile right now?
Right now, I am reading The Librarians’s Guide to Homelessness, by Ryan J. Dowd. At the moment, our staff is taking an online course on the topic by the author, and the feedback has been very good. Next on my list is Palaces for the People, by Eric Klinenberg. The biggest difference I have found in working in research and academic settings and public libraries is that in the realm of public libraries, it is all about how we interact socially and what we can do to make a just world for all abilities within a shared space. Public libraries are important in creating safe spaces where one has access to knowledge and is free to explore, learn, and grow.

What would people be surprised to learn about you?
I am a violinist with the Nutmeg Symphonic Pops Orchestra and the Civic Orchestra of New Haven, but I think people would be surprised to know that I play the piano, spending my spare time learning jazz standards. Maybe when I retire from the library world you will find me in a hotel lounge playing and singing a Nat King Cole song.

Lisa Karim is the director of the Simsbury Public Library.

CONNECTICUT LIBRARIES TRANSFORM®
The American Library Association annual conference was held this year in Washington D.C. Many CT librarians were able to take advantage of the east coast proximity to attend. Here is a roundup of their experiences:

From our ALA councilor, Erin Shea:
Something new occurred—council sessions began with a discussion on equity, diversity, and inclusion through a social justice lens. Having an interactive workshop was unusual for a council session, and there was a lot of great feedback afterward.

Several positive resolutions were passed, including these two highlights:

- A resolution on library service for children in detention at migrant detention centers passed, denouncing their existence and the deplorable conditions of existing centers.
- A resolution on renaming the Melvil Dewey Medal, an award to recognize librarians for achievement in recent creative leadership passed due to his reputation as a racist, misogynist, anti-Semite. The awards committee will be charged with coming up with the new name.

Answer Key
Stephanie Prato, Simsbury Public Library
Jennifer VanNostrand, CT Library Consortium
Ramona Burkey, Russell Library
Jennifer Datum, CLA

What inspiration did you get from any of the featured speakers?
ALSC always focuses on diversity and I’m inspired by that. I felt very inspired by Hoda Kotb’s speech. She talked a lot about how she was rejected from every TV station she interviewed at for over six months before she found the one person willing to take a chance on her. Her message was that it only takes one person who believes in you to set you on the path to success, and I found this applicable to how so many people get started in librarianship, but also spoke to how sometimes librarians are that person for their patrons. It was incredibly inspiring and powerful to hear George Takei speak about spending his formative years in an internment camp for Japanese-Americans during WWII.

What impressed you on the exhibit floor?
I LOVE visiting the exhibits. I always get so many great ideas for space improvements and interactives. The sheer size of it! So much to look at – if I had to pick one it would obviously have to be the LOC booth which was a replica of their rotunda and a service desk.

Since I had my 11-year-old with me at the exhibits, I think I truly appreciated for the first time how many STEM- and youth-related vendors were there, and how willing they were to interact with youngsters. My son had a great time playing with
3-D printers, musical instruments, a LEGO wall, and puzzles. It was the most fun I’ve ever had at the exhibit hall!

Favorite author signing or sighting?
I didn’t get to see her, actually, but Wendy Xu, an up-and-coming graphic novel writer/artist, spoke at ALA. I hired her as a page at the Cheshire Public Library when she was 16!

Behind us in line for the Eoin Colfer book signing was a conference attendee named Holly Short (also the name of a character in Colfer’s popular Artemis Fowl series.) We all got a kick out of that!

Takeaway from any sessions you attended?
• Requiring the MLS degree for entry-level positions can be a major impediment when we are trying to recruit people of color into the profession.
• Adopt a growth/readiness mindset to effect real organizational change
• Some libraries are moving towards a focus on “organizing the work” versus “organizing the staff.” This changes how departments and the org chart are set up.

Overall impressions and highlights?
One of the better ALA conferences I’ve been to.
The Library of Congress offered a special night open house limited to conference attendees. They had representatives from all of their departments. I met Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden in the gift shop!

Networking stories?
It’s always wonderful to catch up with colleagues around the country and I’ve met so many great people through the conference and my participation in ALSC.

Had an interesting side conversation with a nuclear regulatory librarian (Russell Library also used to have a nuclear regulatory librarian; we were the official government nuclear document repository for many years, before CT Yankee was decommissioned).

What non-conference side visit(s) were you able to do in DC?
My conferences are pretty packed and I don’t often get to do much in the location. I did get to have dinner with an old friend who lives in the area.

National Portrait Gallery and the Air and Space Museum.
My son and I did a ton of museum visits: Natural History, Holocaust Museum, Portrait Gallery and Museum of Art, Spy Museum, the Museum of African-American History and Culture, and a trolley tour of all the historical sites in DC. We also had some yummy hipster food at Union Market.
The National Postal Museum—a hidden gem, and after all the walking at conference, very close to the subway station!
People in the News

Sharon Clapp has earned a promotion and tenure as the digital resources librarian at CCSU’s Elihu Burritt Library. She is now an associate librarian.

Kymberlee Powe is the new children and young adult library consultant for the Connecticut State Library Division of Library Development.

Martha Brogan is retiring as city librarian and director of the New Haven Free Public Library effective Oct. 31.

At Willimantic Public Library, Rechal Dominguez and Jason Blodgett (r) were hired as library aides. On July 1, Cassandra Fish was promoted to library technical assistant I and Carlos Chiquizuta, Kate Hardisty, and Maria Hernandez were promoted to library technical assistant II.

Roberta La Monaca, director of the Bloomfield Public Libraries retired on July 31, wrapping up a 40-year career in Bloomfield. Roberta began as a children’s librarian in 1979 and became director in 2009. She has agreed to stay on working part time until September 9, 2019 when Elizabeth Lane of the Willimantic Public Library will begin as the new director.

Lorettta Sailor will retire on Aug. 31 after a 24-year career as a library assistant III at the Prosser Public Library and the P. Faith McMahon Library in Bloomfield.

Laurie Iffland has been promoted to director of library technology at the Norwalk Public Library. Laurie has previously worked in both New Canaan and Norwalk as a reference librarian.

Yolanda Bergstrom-Lynch is the new research, instruction, and outreach librarian at Trinity College. She received her MLIS from Valdosta State University in 2017 and an MA in sociology from the University of Michigan in 2006. She was also recently inducted into the Beta Phi Mu International Library & Information Studies Honor Society and has a forthcoming article in Public Services Quarterly titled, “LibGuides by Design: Using Instructional Design Principles and User-Centered Studies to Develop Best Practices.”

At the Brookfield Library:
- Mary Proudfoot retired after nearly 31 years of service. At the time of her retirement, she was the head of children’s services.
- Debbie Brooks was promoted to head of children’s services.
- Meg Gill has been hired as the part time children’s services librarian. This is a new position. She formerly worked at the Beacon Falls Library.
- Abbey Lynch has returned as youth services librarian.

At the Terryville Public Library, administrative assistant Laurie Marconis recently retired after 38 years of service.

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years. Lisa Bilodeau has been promoted to the position of full-time administrative and technical services assistant, and Julia Langeway has also recently been promoted to part-time library assistant.

Anna Korkus is the new full-time reference librarian at Avon Free Public Library

Kate Bengtson began her role as the full-time instructional technology specialist at Connecticut College on Aug. 12.

Melissa Fournier is the new director of the Meriden Public Library.

Nancy Sweeney has been named branch manager of the Fairfield Woods Branch Library.

Emily Kalotai has been hired as the new teen services and young adult librarian at the Hagaman Memorial Library in East Haven. She most recently worked as a circulation assistant at the Fairchild-Nichols Memorial Library.

Scott R. Brill, circulation supervisor, Huntington Branch Library in Shelton, won the 1st Time Attendee Scholarship to the NELA 2019 Annual Conference. The New England Library Association selects one winner from each of the 6 New England states based on an essay about how attending the conference may benefit and aid their library career and work. The scholarship pays the entire registration cost of the conference.


Around the State

Breaking ground for the Hartford Public Library’s new Park Library, which will revitalize the corner of Broad and Park Streets in Hartford. The new two-story, 13,000 sq. ft. building will become the largest branch library in the city of Hartford, providing much needed community resources to an already vibrant retail and residential neighborhood. The new library will include a 150-seat community room, learning lab, meeting rooms, a café, exhibit space and designated adult, teen and children’s areas and a protected courtyard.

City Councilmen John Q. Gale, James Sanchez and T.J. Clarke; Ben Barnes, CFO of the Connecticut State College and University System; Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin; State Senator John Fonfara; State Representative Minnie Gonzalez; Connecticut Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz; Hartford Public Library (HPL) CEO Bridget Quinn-Carey; HPL board president Gregory Davis; HPL facilities manager Mark Parrino; Connecticut State Librarian Kendall Wiggin; HPL Park Branch manager Graciela Rivera; HPL customer experience director Leticia Cotto; community activist Ana Natal; and HPL board secretary Ana Alfaro.
Nominations for this year’s I Love My Librarian award are open until Oct. 21.

The award invites library lovers from across the country to recognize how their librarians transform their communities and improve lives.

Library users from public, school, university, college and community college libraries are encouraged to submit a nomination online at ilovelibraries.org/ilovemylibrarian.

Up to 10 winners will receive a $5,000 cash award and a travel stipend to attend a ceremony in their honor in January 2020, during the ALA’s Midwinter Meeting & Exhibits in Philadelphia.

For additional information, resources and stories from past winners, visit ilovelibraries.org/ilovemylibrarian.

Connecticut’s professional organization of librarians, library staff, friends, and trustees working together: to improve library service to Connecticut, to advance the interests of librarians, library staff, and librarianship, and to increase public awareness of libraries and library services.

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www.ctlibraryassociation.org

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