

# Carnegie

## RESULTS



### **I Love My Librarian Award**

**An Award that Recognizes  
Great Librarians also Highlights  
the Central Role of Libraries in  
Communities Across America**

“Be a little careful about your library,” Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1873. “You will come here and get books that will open your eyes, and your ears, and your curiosity, and turn you inside out or outside in.”

The idea that one must be careful about one’s libraries—and that libraries have the power to open users up in all kinds of ways—has been a longstanding belief of Carnegie Corporation, one that originated with Andrew Carnegie himself. As a young man, he read a great deal in libraries; they introduced him to the works of Shakespeare, Macaulay, Burns, and other authors.

"Libraries had been one of the 'ladders' upon which Carnegie himself had risen," writes Ellen Lagemann in *The Politics of Knowledge*. "He hoped they would do for others what they had done for him." That's why, over the course of several years, Carnegie provided more than \$56 million to build 2,509 libraries all over the world, mostly in the United States. And it's one reason that libraries have long been central to Carnegie Corporation grants. In the 1920s, the Corporation started supporting the American Library Association (ALA), library schools, and a new graduate school at the University of Chicago (which lasted until the late 1980s). It also sponsored several reports on libraries and librarianship, one of which is "to this day considered a landmark in library history," Lagemann writes. The preparation and support of librarians had become very significant to the Corporation, and remained so throughout the century.

A similar conviction inspired *The New York Times* to found *The New York Times* Library Service Award and *The New York Times* Librarian Award in 2000—an award that Carnegie Corporation would, in keeping with its history, begin supporting a few years later. The idea for the prize started percolating in 1998, when journalist Vivian Toy wrote a *Times* article about the Queens Public Library. "Bustling Queens Library Speaks in Many Tongues" described a place where patrons chattered in Chinese, Bengali, Spanish, and English—a place that, with its mix of Hindi fiction, Chinese mysteries, "Sesame Street" books, English classes, and citizenship workshops, "shows clearly that the immigrant's path to the American dream includes frequent trips to the local library."

The 2000 awards honored one librarian and one library staff member from each New York City borough. The goal of the award, according to a 2001 press release, was to "recognize those individuals who provide outstanding community service on a consistent basis." It complemented the *Times*' devotion to education and literacy, and reflected its view that libraries serve not only as resources for books but also as centers for community, immigration resources, information, culture, and education. "Access to information is part of the bedrock of our society," Alyse Myers, formerly on staff at the *Times*, said in 2004.

Over the course of the next few years, the scope of

the award expanded to encompass surrounding counties and then the nation as a whole; in 2006, it started including academic librarians among its winners. All the while, the nomination process has remained as democratic as the public library itself. Library users or colleagues nominate the librarians using forms available in libraries and online. They answer questions such as "What sets him/her apart?" and "Please discuss how the nominee has helped you and/or others and made your experience of the library a more positive one." Any librarian who has received accredited master's degrees in certain librarianship-oriented fields, and who works in an American public, school, or academic library, is eligible for the prize.

## Creating a Partnership

By 2008, the *Times* was facing financial constraints and seeking a source of support. In response, Carnegie Corporation awarded the ALA \$489,000 to sponsor a new "Carnegie Corporation of New York/*New York Times* I Love My Librarian Award." Corporation staff hoped that the program would publicize librarians' abilities to improve their communities and—by highlighting the achievements of the winners—inspire other librarians to boost their own performance. "And so was born the tripartite arrangement between *The New York Times*, Carnegie Corporation, and ALA," explained Rookaya Bawa, former program officer at the Corporation. "Carnegie Corporation makes a grant to the ALA, and the ALA manages the process." *The New York Times* provides free ad space, and hosts an awards ceremony at the end of each year.

The Corporation, with its lengthy history of supporting libraries<sup>1</sup>—as well as its more general emphasis on altruism—made a logical partner for the award. "There was no more worthy institution to run and implement such an award than Carnegie Corporation," Dr. Bawa said. "The commitment of the awardees is to doing real and permanent good,"

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<sup>1</sup> The Corporation does not currently have a program of support for libraries in the U.S., except for a few past grants for specific purposes. The Corporation's recent library-related efforts have focused on sub-Saharan Africa, primarily South Africa.

she added, quoting one of Andrew Carnegie's goals for his philanthropy. "They want to help people change the world."

When the Corporation became involved, it expanded the award to include school librarians as well as academic and public ones. The inspiration for this extension, Dr. Bawa said, was the Corporation's interest in all those sectors. "Carnegie Corporation," she noted, "has a legacy in the public library sector, and big investments in the academic

and school sector." The Corporation's program in American education constitutes "one of the threads that ran through all our programs and recognized Andrew Carnegie in his complete spirit."

Today, 10 people out of thousands of nominees win the prize each year. The ALA narrows the pool, and a judging panel—which consists of past presidents from the ALA's public library association, academic library association, and



## Beatriz Guevara

Charlotte Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Library System  
2012 Winner, I Love My Librarian Award

I am an Adult Services Librarian at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library system. When I was younger and just beginning to learn English, I would frequently visit my middle school library and read books to increase

my vocabulary. There, I met a wonderful, bilingual librarian and decided to be just like her when I grew up.

Right after high school, I got my first "real" library job in circulation while attending college part time. After completing my general education requirements, I went to work in our public school system and saved up enough money to become a fulltime student and work part time at my university library. Upon graduation, I worked in a public high school as a Spanish teacher before coming back to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library system and working in the nonfiction department. I then worked in our Outreach Department and later at a smaller branch while getting my MLIS. After graduation, I worked in the Union County Public Library system as the Family Literacy Coordinator before finally becoming a "real" librarian in 2011!

Because I speak Spanish and love the language, the culture, and the people, I do a lot of work with the Spanish-speaking community in Charlotte Mecklenburg. I love to do family programs because I know that family is very important to Latinos and it's something that I deeply value. I teach computer classes, offer story times in Spanish as well as early literacy workshops, give library presentations and tours and try to do outreach in the community. More importantly, I try to anticipate and meet the needs of our patrons and show them that the library is a beautiful place that belongs to them.

The award changed my life and career by making every interaction that I have with patrons much more meaningful. In a way, the award validated what I do as a librarian because it showed me that patrons appreciate the work that I do and that I have the potential to improve their lives. I know there will be many more opportunities to expand the library's service to the community, including at the national and international levels.

Additionally, the award brought national recognition to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. One of the local Spanish-language newspapers, *Hola Noticias*, published an article about me winning the award on December 2012. I received many calls from patrons who knew me from the library and were excited to read my story in the paper. They took great pride in knowing that a Latina was being recognized nationally. People still stop to talk to me in grocery stores and community events and many patrons have become library users as a result of these outreach interactions. Winning the award has definitely changed the way many Latino patrons view our profession and the library in general because it has made it more approachable to them by getting to know a person first and later the institution.

Winning the I Love My Librarian Award meant that I had accomplished one of my lifelong goals, which was to make a difference in a young person's life. I think all young people need someone to look up to, someone to guide them, give them advice and above all, to listen and care. All youth have such amazing potential but they often need someone to believe in them and provide support along the way. I feel humbled to know that a part of me continues through the lives of these young people, who are the future of America and of the world.

I never had an opportunity to thank my own librarian for the impact she made in my life. This award is hers as well.

school library association, as well as a *New York Times* representative and the current president of the ALA—choose the 10 winners, according to Dr. Bawa, who also served on the committee until last year.

## The Problems and Possibilities of Libraries Today

What's the role of libraries and librarians today? They fulfill countless practical functions, some of which are relatively new. In a 2008 speech, Carnegie Corporation President Vartan Gregorian described librarians as “the people many turn to for help in navigating the complex and information-rich world of the Web where the quality of the research and reports is not always clear.” In 2011, Caroline Kennedy, who spoke at the “I Love My Librarian” awards ceremony, mentioned a plethora of other purposes, geared toward many kinds of users. Libraries, she said, are “busy social hubs for the exchange of life skills and information. They have become community centers in the very best sense—places where we build community and weave together lives and dreams. The unemployed come to find job training and job opportunities, new immigrants come to learn English, students use the library for college readiness and college access, and adolescents can explore difficult social and emotional issues in the safe space of a library.”

But beyond these myriad services, librarians and libraries play a more symbolic role; as Gregorian has pointed out, they are foundational to our democracy. “Libraries are among those cherished institutions that are most representative of our open society,” he said. “We must, therefore, acknowledge that libraries—and hence, librarians—are indispensable to the strength and vitality of our nation and our democracy. Libraries have and always will contain our nation’s heritage, the heritage of humanity, the record of its triumphs and failures, the record of mankind’s intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements. And more, they are the diaries of the human race and the true instruments of civilization that provide tools for learning, understanding and progress. We celebrate them as our link to the past, our partner in navigating the present, and our guide to the future.”

Kennedy echoed these sentiments, calling libraries

“tabernacles of personal freedom: freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of opportunity and the true test of liberty—freedom to dissent.” For that reason, she said, libraries have drawn attacks throughout history from repressive regimes, and she cites Mao’s destruction of the libraries of Tibet and the Serbs’ destruction of the Bosnian library.

And now, she said, libraries face another form of attack, from an “insidious adversary”: slashed funds. On both the state and federal level, the necessary money isn’t flowing into libraries: as of the time she made her speech, New York allocated \$6.25 per student for library books, which is insufficient to buy a single book. “When times are tough, access to knowledge is seen as a luxury, not a necessity,” she said, “though in a difficult economic climate, we know that people need and use libraries more than ever.”

## A Focus on Jobs

Examining the winning librarians reveals a mosaic of the challenges and joys that contemporary librarians face—as well as the personal and professional attributes that distinguish effective librarians.

The work of many winning librarians reflects Kennedy’s final point: that libraries play important roles in weak economies. In a county suffering from a high unemployment rate, Martha Ferriby, of Hackley Public Library in Muskegon, Michigan, offers free sessions on resumé writing, job searches, and interview techniques. By 2011, when she was nominated, the library was providing 57 such programs, up from six a decade before.

Mary Ellen Pellington tailors her employment-oriented efforts to fit the unique cultural needs of her community. She works in the Octavia Library in Gallup, New Mexico, where many people speak Navajo and Zuni at home, and where unemployment was punishingly high as of 2012. In response to this problem, Pellington engaged the Small Business Association, Chamber of Commerce, and local campus of the University of New Mexico to provide sessions on marketing and employment training. More unusually, she held workshops on activities key to the particular economy of the area. Knowing that most of the residents in





## Amy Cheney

Alameda County (California) Library, Juvenile Hall  
2008 Winner, I Love My Librarian Award

The I Love My Librarian Award was amazing to receive—when I heard I screamed and the kids in my library started banging on the table. It's impacted me both professionally and personally. It brought atten-

tion to the program here, and benefited both the kids and the institution.

Rock star librarians have been serving youth in custody for years, but given the number of youth with low literacy levels living in poverty and the number of juvenile halls in this country, libraries actually serve only a small fraction of this population. Librarians onsite are even fewer. The award contributed to creating more interest in serving this population. It also helped galvanize me to do more and on a bigger scale, which has brought more attention to services for young adults in the system and the specific collection needs of reluctant readers from poverty classes, many of whom are African-American and Latino.

We already had a listserve (yalsalkdown), but now we have the Library Services for Youth in Custody Web site, <http://www.youthlibraries.org>, which gets upwards of 50 hits a day. The site enables librarians who are serving or have an interest to connect with others in the field.

As a direct result of the award I was asked to write for *School Library Journal*, where I now have my own column: <http://www.slj.com/2013/01/books-media/collection-development/ya-underground-books-for-teens-you-might-have-missed/> I also review for the fantastic Adult Books for Teens blog. Titles that I research to serve my population are of use to the greater library community. I am thrilled that the Juvenile in Justice project by Richard Ross, which I gave a starred review for *School Library Journal*, won both an Alex Award and a Quick Pick this year; this probably wouldn't

have come about if it weren't for the award, because most likely I wouldn't be writing for a national magazine. I have also started a new book committee <http://www.youthlibraries.org/margins-committee>, seeking books of relevance to kids who are poor, on the streets, in custody... or all three.

I definitely have more volunteer and intern interest as a result of the visibility of the award. I had other libraries, librarians, and probation departments come to see what's going on and invite me to speak at conferences—more than usual—and I gained more authority as a result. It's extremely important for librarians to have authority, especially when partnering with probation!

Our program is still in existence and funding has been solidified as a direct result of receiving this award. Outreach and nontraditional library services can often be seen as incidental, some of the first things to cut, as they may not be fully integrated into the funding of the library. These services are often partnerships that take a lot of relationship building over many changes of leadership. Our program started with a grant, no library space, and only a part-time librarian, and it took work to get it to where it is today: the best room in the facility with a full-time librarian. The award helped a lot.

The award also gave me a much-needed boost of appreciation. As we all know, librarians are overworked and underfunded. We are dedicated to the services we provide, and our reward is our own satisfaction, often, and the appreciation of our patrons. For me, the award was the delicious frosting on the cake, validating my focus and advocacy about what's real and important: service, especially to the underserved. It carried me through a few—even a lot—of challenging times. It's always nice to be recognized, and the recognition has kept the dream alive of increasing services across the country.

the region derive their income from selling Native American arts and crafts, Pellington hosted numerous craft workshops on weaving, soap making, quilting, candle making, aromatherapy, knitting, card making, and silversmithing.

Other librarians brought special training to bear on their

efforts to assist library users seeking employment. Jennifer Keohane, who worked as a business outreach librarian at the Simsbury Public Library in Simsbury, Connecticut, applied her education well in setting up career-oriented programs, wrote her nominator. She offered individual sessions on

“business planning, marketing and research assistance” that have helped Hartford-area entrepreneurs start and grow businesses; she used market analysis to assess and promote library programs, collaborating with a variety of external organizations. “What she can be most proud of is her ability to create, organize, and promote timely, relevant, and free business and career programs,” her nominator wrote. “In an eight-year timespan, over 6,700 people attended the more than 300 programs offered by the library’s Business Resource Center. More than 45 percent of the attendees are first-time participants. She is a pacesetter.” (Keohane now works as executive director of the Connecticut Library Consortium.)

Some librarians provide even more immediate help for patrons who face financial difficulties. After Sandra Ross-Forrest, who works at the North Avondale Branch Library in Birmingham, Alabama, noticed that some community members were having a hard time making ends meet, she organized drives for toys, school supplies, and clothing. The families who benefited “truly love Sandra and others for what they have done for them,” her nominator attested. “Had it not been for North Avondale Library and Sandra, I don’t know what kind of holidays and a return to school these children would have had.”

Those who receive assistance in seeking jobs are just as grateful. When a patron of Charlotte Mecklenburg Library in Charlotte, North Carolina, expressed interest in getting her GED and becoming a receptionist, her librarian, Beatriz Guevara, explained how to take advantage of the library’s resources. The patron then started to prepare for the GED and research community colleges and job opportunities. “My dream has been dormant for so many years because I felt I didn’t have the skills I needed to accomplish it,” she said. “Meeting Beatriz has been a blessing and, through her help, I know I can achieve my goals and show my children that they can do anything they set their minds to. I have no words to thank her!”

## Serving the Underserved

In addition to looking out for the unemployed, Guevara looks out for the Latino community in her area,

showcasing another strength of the winning librarians: an awareness of the needs of all kinds of library patrons—including those whose needs sometimes get overlooked. Guevara formed a Latino Services Team that caters to the needs of Spanish-speaking patrons in the county. The library system now offers a phone line accessible to Spanish speakers that provides information about the library; before the establishment of the line, Guevara’s nominator wrote, “patrons visiting a library branch with no Spanish-speaking staff had to wait until an interpreter was found (either in person or by phone) and when this was not possible, had to leave empty-handed.” Additionally, Guevara helped create a Spanish-language bookmark sharing information about the library’s programs and services, plus the number for the phone line. Hundreds of library users have taken advantage of a basic computer course offered in Spanish, where they have learned how to type, apply for jobs online, and perform other essential skills.

The telephone proves crucial to another librarian committed to an underserved group of patrons: people with disabilities. Madlyn Schneider, library manager at the Queens Public Library in New York City, uses a conference-call system to meet the needs of homebound library users. Through the Mail-a-Book program, she sends patrons reading material, and conducts a book club over the phone three times a week. For its participants, the club is significant for personal as well as for literary reasons. “In my case, I have made new friends (very difficult if you do not go out) through these calls and we often speak to each through private calls,” wrote a nominator. “I look to my new friends for friendship, advice, and support. When one is virtually homebound with medical issues, the group becomes the foundation for each other. We are supportive and try to help even if it is just a phone call or a note.”

In addition to enjoying a book club over the phone, homebound patrons of Ms. Schneider’s branch have had the opportunity to “attend” seminars on topics ranging from health to history to art. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance, conducted many such classes, providing binders filled with images of artworks and delivering lectures over the phone in five- or six-week series; the Museum of Modern Art provided a similar opportunity. “It is very

exciting since I am unable to go to museums,” the nominator wrote. “Prior to Ms. Schneider’s involvement, I was quite isolated and was always thinking of activities to keep myself occupied. Now, I do not notice my walls.”

Ms. Schneider uses the phone for extracurricular reasons as well. Appreciating “that homebound people are often lonely and depressed on holidays,” she conducts calls on those occasions. During the nerve-wracking lead-up

to Hurricane Irene, “she recognized how apprehensive we were and she held a telephone conference call to get us through it.”

The librarian’s ministrations have influenced perceptions of the homebound, the nominator added. “The community has become more aware of us and we are no longer the ‘invisible’ population. Now thanks to Ms. Schneider, we are seen in three dimensions.”



## Stefanie Wittenbach

Texas A&M University-San Antonio  
2010 Winner, I Love My Librarian Award

My first job in a library was when I was in second grade in Houston, Texas. My teacher didn’t like me and the feeling was mutual. So, I went to the library as much as I could. The librarian, Ed Miller, welcomed me and

let me shelve books and run filmstrips for the kindergarteners. He taught that seven-year-old to love connecting with people and sharing the joy of what a library has to offer. I got his autograph when we moved away at the end of that year and I still have it in an old scrapbook along with an article about him. I was destined to be an archivist as well as a librarian. I often wondered about him over the years. Unfortunately, he’s no longer living. I would have loved to let him know how much he inspired me.

The I Love My Librarian Award has been the highlight of my career. I’m not someone who participates on national committees or publishes extensively. I’ve spent most of my career trying to make my institution a better place for library employees, students, faculty, and staff, which mostly goes unnoticed in terms of external awards. So, this award is something I never thought I’d ever get to experience. I definitely got more press attention because of the award, and the president of my institution brings dignitaries to the library to introduce them to me and proudly tells them about my award. I do think it has changed others’ impression of me and my role on campus. A number of professional colleagues have also congratulated me on the award due to the wonderful publicity from Carnegie Corporation of New York, *The New York Times*, and the American Library Association (ALA). I

even have prospective employees comment on it when we interview them!

I will always have the fondest affection for Carnegie Corporation and *The New York Times*. They enabled my first visit ever to New York. Another important milestone in my life! I have been a member of ALA for many years, so it was professionally very rewarding to have them be part of this award, too.

During my career, I’ve tried to make the library an inviting place to work and an inviting place to visit. At Texas A&M-San Antonio, the work has definitely been about supporting our students, even as we started the library from scratch. This has meant going beyond the boundaries of traditional library work, including helping students with course materials that library staff don’t usually help with (Tumblr pages, Blackboard tools, etc.), offering instruction not usually provided (regarding APA style and academic honesty, for example), and generally holding students’ hands in ways that just let them know someone cares about their success in school. As a result, one librarian had her name included on a student’s cap during graduation (it said, “Thanks Mom and Pru!”); a student did an original painting with us in mind and gave us each color prints of it with a thank-you note; and other students provided positive feedback. Those are examples of making a difference, having an impact, and making the institution a better place.

The greatest challenge about starting a library from scratch has been that there are no policies, procedures, or systems in place. That’s also the greatest benefit of starting a library from scratch! Another wonderful reward has been hand-picking the librarians and staff and putting a great team in place.

Younger patrons with disabilities call for equally creative approaches on the parts of librarians. Patricia Updike works at the Webb Street School in Gastonia, North Carolina, a K-12 institution for students with cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, or both. To teach complicated literature—*The Odyssey*, *Animal Farm*, *Huckleberry Finn*—Ms. Updike integrates the literary work into every subject area the students study. “Last year, our students studied the classic *Beowulf*,” her nominator wrote. “Many teachers wondered how Patti could ever teach a complex novel such as *Beowulf* to over 70 high school students with severe cognitive delays.” Ms. Updike’s solution was, fittingly, complex: she conducted hours of research, and then “adapted each chapter of the book and made visual supports to supplement the reading.” She worked with other teachers to incorporate different elements of *Beowulf* into each class. “For example, in math class our students designed a Viking ship and looked at what the lengths and measurements of a real Viking ship would have been. In geography and science, our students studied about life in Scandinavia and took a virtual tour of the country on Google Earth. In our life skills class the students made Old English food like Scandinavian donuts. Our students were totally fascinated by *Beowulf* and absolutely loved reading and learning the story.”

Blind library patrons have their own particular needs—needs to which Venetia V. Demson, who works as chief of Adaptive Services at the DC Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, is particularly sensitive. She has pioneered programs for blind library users that have been replicated around the globe. Working with Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, she organized a Braille Book Club for children as well as a chess club. Nine young library patrons visited the White House, and Kareem Dale, special assistant for disability policy to President Obama, visited the library in turn. The library also conducted Accessibility Camp DC, the first “unconference”—or participant-driven conference—to focus on Web accessibility. The result, according to Demson’s nominator, is “a grassroots network in the local Web accessibility and adaptive technology communities that centers on the use of library services and programs, and a movement to mirror this structure at the national and international levels.” Additionally, Demson has fostered a sense of community for the visually impaired. Said her nominator,

“She has made the library a warm, welcoming, and caring place to go to use adaptive technology, to do homework, and socialize with other individuals with similar impairments. She has arranged for successful members of the community who also happen to have disabilities to speak with students and encourage and even mentor them.”

Librarians can also make a difference to detained students. Thanks to Amy Cheney, who works at Alameda County Library, Juvenile Hall in San Leandro, California, many such students read their first books. They turn to her for advice on what to read, and she updates teachers and other staff members about recent books about or for young adults. Her nominator cited students who wrote of their experiences with Ms. Cheney: “Hearing the story with you standing in front of me had a big effect,” and “thanks for helping me open my eyes and giving me hope that I can make it in this life.” The nominator also quoted a parent who reports that her daughter, due to the influence of Ms. Cheney, adores reading and passes along recommendations of books; her vocabulary has increased and “she no longer talks like a streetwise young person.” Before the implementation of the library program, 68 percent of surveyed students reported that they didn’t believe there were any good books; that figure had plummeted to 5 percent by 2008, when Ms. Cheney won the award. “It’s one thing to have a lot of books, but it’s another thing to have books that attract delinquent youth,” the nominator noted. “The books she found captivate the youth such that teenagers normally alienated from the reading experience are taken away to a faraway land through reading adventures.”

Senior citizens constitute yet another group who benefit from the attentions of librarians. Ms. Ross-Forrest, of the North Avondale Branch Library in Birmingham, Alabama, takes special measures to care for elderly people in the community who can no longer come to the library. During lunch breaks, she visits their homes on a weekly basis; she delivers books and snacks and lets them know about new opportunities at the library. The value of library services to able-bodied older patrons can’t be overestimated, either: take senior citizen Rockameem Bell, who patronizes Madison Public Library in Madison, Wisconsin. His librarian, Christina Wagner, runs the Odyssey program, a free, humanities-oriented, six-credit college course for adults who can’t afford



college. He told Ms. Wagner's nominator that "he would give her his 'Jesus Walking' award for absolutely miraculous work....Because of the Odyssey Project, I have the power to know, to think, to write, to become so much more than I was." As a student in the program, he encountered "Socrates, William Blake, Plato, Shakespeare, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, and so much more! I'm hooked on Socrates. I know Mr. Frederick Douglass. I'm coming out of my cave."

## The Power of Personality

The secret ingredient that enhances such delicious encounters is the librarians' personalities. Again and again, nominators highlight the extraordinary warmth of their nominees. Some mention the librarians' popularity in their communities. "I should offer a word of warning to anyone that might decide to walk down the street with Mary Ellen Pellington," wrote that librarian's nominator. "You may never reach your destination because so many people will stop her to talk." Jennifer Keohane's nominator made a similar point: "When you are with Jennifer, or talking about Jennifer, you just need to mention her first name and everyone knows her."

A sense of enthusiasm goes particularly far. When a student asked Oceana Wilson, director of library and information services at Bennington College, to recommend books on metaphysics, she provided one and even included the book's call number: "You might want to start with *Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysics* by Earl Conee and Theodore Sider. (BD111 .C6263 2005). The back cover claims the book 'makes metaphysics genuinely accessible, even fun'—wahoo!"

And when a student asked a more playful question—"Will you marry me? Yes/No?"—Ms. Wilson answered in kind. She wrote on her Facebook page:

Dear Distant Love (PL984.E8 W39 1997),  
I Confess (VHS Drama 488) that I Cried For You  
(Jennings CD4046) When We Were Very Young  
(PZ7.M64 P6 1961) but You Don't Love Me Yet  
(PS3562.E8544 Y68 2007) so now I Am My

Own Wife (PS3573.R53252 I3 2004) and I  
Don't Need You Any More (PS 3525 .I5156 I17  
1967)  
With Love And Disregard, (ND237.O47 W5  
2002)  
Oceana

Such good humor is intrinsic to her serious work as a librarian.

## Expertise in Their Fields

Those librarians with expertise in their fields—be it art history or poetry—draw admiration, too. Laura Farwell Blake, head of services for Harvard University's Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library, serves as the liaison for the English department, and "possesses an uncanny knowledge of the field and methodologies of research within it," her nominator wrote; she is considered "a profound resource, like a kind of biblio-oracle, though much less terrifying than the Delphic variety." Ms. Blake regularly guides instructors through library resources, showing them how best to integrate Harvard's library resources into their courses. And she is known for answering very complex questions very quickly, "and with total nonchalance."

According to the nominator, a graduate student in English: "One of my colleagues, Shari, had called Laura a couple of years ago. Shari had been at a loss, trying unsuccessfully to determine which of Shakespeare's plays had been the most frequently performed in 1603. On the phone, Shari explained her situation, and asked Laura if she knew of any way she might be able to get this info. 'Why don't you come to my office, and we'll figure it out?' Laura said. When Shari arrived at Laura's door 10 minutes later, Laura was holding a slip of paper with the play's name and the number of performances on it. Shari's jaw dropped. 'Now let me show you how I did this,' Laura said."

Depending on where the librarians are placed, such expertise can have wide-ranging effects. Take Greta Marlatt, librarian at the Naval Postgraduate School, who plays an important role in the Center for Homeland Defense and Security and the Homeland Security Digital Library; thanks to

“her knowledge and outstanding reputation across campus,” she was involved in the establishment of both projects and in their ongoing development. The library, her nominator explains, “is a unique and important research tool that is free to those involved in any of the many facets of homeland security work.” And it gives Ms. Marlatt’s work enormous reach: “Since our alumni also have access to these materials, her impact on the work of our nation’s career military officers, some of whom are many years removed from their graduate education, is immense,” her nominator wrote, adding that Marlatt’s influence is international in scope, since many students hail from other countries. He added: “Her patience in working with these high-level international scholars on research topics, such as civil–military relations in their countries, can have a profound global impact.”

## Starting from Scratch

A few librarians faced the unusual challenge of founding libraries where none had been before. Texas A&M University, San Antonio, operates out of a retrofitted elementary school with scant space for a library. For years, rather than hosting its own library, the university had employed interlibrary services from nearby colleges. But in under two days, Stefanie Wittenbach transformed a storage room into a library, her nominator wrote; within a year, over 14,000 users had enjoyed its services. She also added tutorials, online and in person; new staff; and hours—it is now open seven days a week. She increased the library’s collection by 300 percent in under a year, through both gifts and purchases. Many of these materials are electronic, reflecting the limitations of the school’s space—as well as the speed of developing technology.

In adding a library to the university, her nominator adds, Ms. Wittenbach has had a more profound effect: she has “contributed crucially to introducing an academic culture to an institution that previously has lacked such a culture. In fact, the latter has almost certainly been her greatest contribution. Meticulous and unfailingly patient with students, Stefanie has been instrumental in standing up for core values of higher education: academic freedom, access to

information, and the fundamental importance of the library to the quality of any university”—values that Gregorian and Kennedy also highlighted when discussing the significance of libraries.

Seamus Scanlon encountered a similar task when he arrived at the City College Center for Worker Education at the City College of New York, which also lacked a library. His school offers college degrees to working adults, which meant students were “so busy with work, school, and family it was difficult to get to [a library] during their ‘time off,’” a nominator explained. Nor would seeking out a library have come naturally to many of them: “Many of our students didn’t know what a library was when they came to Center for Worker Education! They are often the first in their families to graduate from high school, let alone go to college.”

After moving to a new facility, the school had space for a library for the first time, and “wonder of wonders, we got Seamus,” the nominator wrote. “He started that library in an empty room, all by himself.” To create the library, Mr. Scanlon multitasked: he gathered donated books, bought others, and catalogued them all. He also ordered furniture, bookshelves, and computers, and put the books on the shelves—after which he conducted “a PR campaign” to introduce himself, the library, and the library’s services.

In classrooms and in the library, Mr. Scanlon explains how to use the library and its resources, more generally helping “students understand the value and techniques of real research. . . . He is the only one to staff it and see that all its needs are met.” One of its needs, Mr. Scanlon saw, was acquiring many copies of assigned books—particularly useful when many students are supporting families. The nominator wrote: “It does my heart good to see students sitting in class with a copy of the novel we are reading stamped as owned by our library.”

## Librarian as Activist

Caroline Kennedy’s statement that libraries are under “insidious attack” from lack of funds was borne out by the experience of Paul Clark in 2010. When the state threatened to slash public library funding, Mr. Clark, who works

at the Clay County Library system in Fleming Island, Florida, turned into an activist. On his days off, he traveled to Tallahassee and stood in the Capitol Rotunda or outside Appropriations Committee meetings with signs, waiting for legislators, lobbyists, and media members to approach him, a nominator reports. When they did, he had talking points and handouts ready; he shared stories about how libraries could change lives, especially in rural areas like the one where he works. He also maintained a Web site called “State Aid to Libraries.” He attracted considerable media attention, and became known as “the Library Guy.”

According to a nominator, politicians developed the habit of telling Mr. Clark how discussions were going, and giving him advice, until on the last night of the conference—after they had voted not to slash funds—“the Senate Budget Chair looked around the room and asked, ‘Where is the Library Guy?’ People searched for Paul, but he had gone home to his family, having been at the Capitol that day until the early evening and the night before until nearly midnight. At that point, the Senate Chair spoke for several minutes about Paul Clark, and what a wonderful job he had done representing libraries and how other constituencies should look to Paul as a model for advocacy.”

The next day, the front page of the *St. Petersburg Times* declared, “Library Guy shows how one man can make a difference in Tallahassee.” And Mr. Clark stood outside the Capitol with a sign reading “Thank You.”

## Effects of the Award

For its recipients, the award often meant new attention and respect from the community and the press; for some, the prize invited more funding. And many reaped emotional rewards as well. Laura Grunwerg, former director of Youth Services at River Edge Library in River Edge, New Jersey, took it as “a justification of the hard work I’ve done over the years,” according to NorthJersey.com.

The prize also made librarians feel recognized—which was, after all, its original goal. “I never thought that what I do would ever be noticed by people in that world,” Kelley McDaniel, who works at Helen King Middle School in

Portland, Maine, told the *Portland Press Herald*. “It was one of those experiences that, at the time, doesn’t feel real.”

And some librarians made the point that the award honored not individual librarians but whole libraries. As Ellen M. Dolan, who works at the Shrewsbury Public Library in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, told the *Worcester Telegram*, the award reflects on many people—herself, the library staff, and its trustees. Perhaps that’s why so many librarians put their award money into the strapped budgets of the libraries themselves. Dana Thomas, a media specialist at Cypress Lake Middle School in Fort Myers, Florida, funneled the money back into her school library. She told *School Library Journal* that the library had only 25 cents in its budget at the time she won the award. Her nominator had dubbed her “the backbone of cross-curriculum projects,” but for Thomas, the people who really deserved the award were the 750 students the school serves. “This award isn’t about me,” she said.

Chris Wagner took a similar tack, deciding to give most of the money to the Odyssey Project that so benefited Rockameem Bell and others. “I could spend it on a new dress if I wanted to!” she told the *Madison Times*. “But I can’t think of anything more important right now than seeing that people who have been denied the right to go to college because of income or whatever other barriers” get the opportunity.

As for McDaniel, her money went toward a program in honor of the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War, reported the television channel WSCH 6 Portland. The program includes movie screenings, literary discussions, and visits from historians. It also involves a field trip to Boston geared toward increasing students’ knowledge of African-American history. In a second trip, to Charleston, South Carolina, she plans to bring a dozen students to visit Fort Sumter, the Hunley, and other icons of the Civil War.

## Looking Forward

Starting with the awards in 2013, no one from Carnegie Corporation will be involved in judging the prize; only ALA and *New York Times* representatives will serve on the panel. However, under this new arrangement, any changes to the

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administration of the prize will be marginal, explained Dr. Bawa. That's partly because the prize has been such a success. "The number of applicants ... started at one, two, three hundred, and now it is many thousands," Bawa said. "Every year, there were more and more nominations, and at the ceremony, more and more people come. It's clearly like a winning ticket. People who've won have gone on to make great changes."

*Written by:* Abigail Deutsch. Deutsch is a writer based in New York. Her work appears in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Poetry*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and other publications.



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