

Alaska Collection Leadership Changes

In February, after 32 years at APL, Bruce Merrell, Alaska Collection bibliographer, retired, ending his reign as the in-house expert on all things Alaskan.

In 1986, librarian Bruce was given a mission—to create a collection of Alaska materials that was both comprehensive and inclusive. The materials would be housed in a beautiful three-level turret, connected to the newly opened Z.J. Loussac Public Library in Midtown.

“We had seven staff members and plans for an archives and manuscripts program,” Bruce said. The ambitious vision was revised almost immediately as the state’s constantly revolving boom/bust cycle took a downward turn. In the years since, despite staff cuts and limited funds for collection expansion, Bruce labored on.

His vocation was his passion. He became the man in the know, the go-to guy for eclectic facts. President of the Alaska Historical Society for years, he wrote a guide to the top 67 books about Alaska. He helped thousands of people answering questions such as who “Russian Jack” was, or finding potential names for dogs in Alaska Native languages.

“I wish more people knew it (Alaska Collection) was here,” he said as he cleaned out his office. “It’s so hidden that most people who come to the library never see it or even realize it’s here.

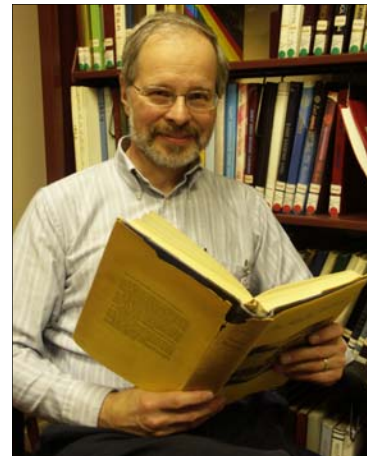
“I’d like to see more outreach through programming or digitization. Scanning maps. Putting a web link to photos and

stories about Alaska—local history could come alive,” Bruce said.

His replacement could not agree more. Michael Catoggio, now the Special Collections Librarian, who headed APL’s Alaskan Department in the early ’80s, has a 30-year career, most of that as a librarian in Alaska.

“We’re blessed with an incredibly deep collection of Alaska materials in print form,” Michael said enthusiastically. “A goal is to use technology so this great resource is accessible 24/7.

“I want to enhance the visibility of the Alaska Collection, to draw people to this part of the library,” he said. “There are community leaders, as well as regular patrons who don’t know about this gem. I want to change that.”



Bruce Merrell



APL Sends Books Along Iditarod Trail



For the second year in a row, Anchorage Public Library supported literacy across Alaska by sending packages of books to checkpoints along the Iditarod Trail, as part of Anchorage Reads, APL’s one book community read. This year’s Target Iditarod Teacher on the Trail Cathy Walters, on right, talks about the books with White Mountain students.

Anchorage Public Library Community Plan

APL is planning for the future! The long-term community plan will help APL and its partner groups respond to community needs and help provide organizational stability over time. The Anchorage Library Foundation Board hired Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants, Agnew: Beck and RIM Design to develop the plan over the next year. The plan is supported by grants from the Rasmuson Foundation and the Municipality.

The plan will clarify the role of the Library in the community, the function of Library facilities, and the provision of services and programs. It will incorporate flexibility for future technological innovations and a system for determining when and where to build new branches and how they would fit into the library system as a whole.



Fight Crime— Teach a Child to Read!

By Karen Keller, Director, Anchorage Public Library

I recently came across this startling information: Some states use elementary school reading scores to help determine the number of prison beds needed in the future. Pairing reading with public safety – sounds like some sort of scare tactic, doesn't it? It certainly grabbed my attention. Correlating elementary school reading scores with future prison numbers—what a startling concept!

It seems like an odd computation initially – prison cells and children's reading abilities – but perhaps the link is really not that surprising. I've always known that reading is a powerful predictor of success; it makes sense that poor reading skills could also be used to predict failure.

"Learning to read and write opens doors to progress and prosperity across a lifetime," states the National Early Literacy Panel's report *Developing Early Literacy*, released in January. The report emphasized the importance of early learning. "The years before kindergarten are a particularly fertile and profitable time to prepare young children to read and learn by teaching them essential literacy skills."

On the other hand, kids who don't get exposed to books face serious challenges in school. According to Anchorage School District officials in a November 2008 *Anchorage Daily News* article, contributing factors to the higher-than-average school drop out rate include kindergartners coming from homes without books, magazines or newspapers.

A downward shift in reading and math skills portends a significantly less literate workforce in 20 years, according to the Education Testing Service. Kurt Landgraf, president of ETS, said reversing this trend will take an increased focus on early childhood education, continuing adult education and programs that keep kids in school.

That's the doom and gloom. Fortunately, our community is doing something to buck these trends. As the Director of our public library, I get to see children discover the love of learning every day. In the past year, more than 40,000 children participated in reading programs at the Anchorage Public Library. That's a 20% rise from the previous year.

Growing local readers is not simply a matter of putting books on the shelves and opening library doors. APL staff is continually looking for ways to attract people and motivate them to read. This winter, for example, our annual community read program, Anchorage Reads, encouraged families to read together by selecting three books for different age groups.

The recently opened Ready to Read Resource Center has created another pathway for developing early literacy in the very youngest Alaskans. Housed at the Loussac Public Library, the Center circulates tubs and kits full of early childhood books to agencies that serve children, birth to 3, throughout Alaska. Day care centers and rural libraries can check out Ready to Read Tub with 30-50 board books for in-house use, or the Read to Me at Home Tub, each with board books that can be loaned to families for at-home reading.

Measuring future prison populations by the reading abilities of elementary school children is an undeniable paradigm shift. The public library – with a focus on early literacy, reading promotion and offering books for all ages – thus becomes one of our community's most proactive public safety assets.

Reading to a child is just about the simplest thing you can do to help them achieve. Be a role model (and a crime fighter) and READ!

Reprint: Anchorage Daily News, Compass Opinion, March 21, 2009

2008 APL Statistics

APL signed up 20,000 new cardholders, an increase of 10%

Loussac patrons logged 71733.7 computer hours—a total of 8.2 years

Library staff answered 219,043 reference questions—nearly one for every person in Anchorage

APL branches held more than 900 programs with a total attendance of 60,953 people

More than 6,000 adults & children from 20 Alaskan communities participated in the 2008 Big Read

APL circulated 1,599,025 items

Hundreds of volunteers donated 9,084 hours to library projects



2009 Reading Rendezvous Kicks Off APL's Summer Reading Celebration

Get excited about reading during the summer on Saturday, May 16! Anchorage Public Library, Alaska Center for the Book and Friends of Pets are hosting Reading Rendezvous on the lawn at the Lousac Library from noon to 4pm. This free, annual event is the traditional kick-off to the Summer Reading Celebration, which encourages and challenges kids, teens and adults to read during the summer months.

can be enjoyed by everyone throughout the year.

Enjoy an afternoon of entertainment and fun along the theme of Be Creative @ Your Library. Musical group Fiddle-De-Dee and Magician Don Russell will perform and community booths will feature a variety of activities for kids. Sponsors of the event include Target, ML&P, Friends of the Library, Best Beginnings and Conoco Philips. Sign up for the library's Summer Reading Celebration. More than 4,000 Anchorage kids, teens and adults took part in last summer's reading program with almost 800 signing up at Reading Rendezvous.



Reading Rendezvous 2008 — After registering for the Summer Reading Program (top photo) hundreds of Anchorage kids and their parents spread out across the lawn at Lousac to try individual and group activities.

Reading Rendezvous started in 2001, as the summer reading program finale. In 2002, organizers moved the event to the beginning of summer to emphasize research showing that children who continue to read during summer vacation perform better in the fall when school resumes. One of the goals of the Reading Rendezvous is to show that reading is a fun activity that

New this year is Reading Rendezvous Too! Sponsored by Target, this smaller version, at Muldoon Branch Library Saturday, **May 30 from noon-3pm**, offers another opportunity for families to share and celebrate the joys of reading.

Laptop Computer Pilot Program

The number of people who come to area libraries to use computers keeps going up. Lack of space and wiring, as well as costs, keeps a lid on the number of computers any library can house, despite their growing popularity. To circumvent those practical limitations, Anchorage Public Library is conducting a pilot program testing the viability of using laptop computers for in-library use.

Six laptops are available currently at the Muldoon Branch Library. Adults and youth, ages 13-17 (with parent signature approval), can use the computers, if they have an APL library card in good standing and sign initial paperwork.

The laptops can be used anywhere in the library. The computers have wireless Internet access, DVD/CD player capability (bring your own ear buds), some games, word processing and other standard office software. Patrons need a flash drive (thumb drive) to save material. Also—there is no printing capability directly from the laptop computers. Staff at Muldoon is taking advantage of the laptops to offer some introductory computer classes.



Muldoon Branch conducts computer classes on laptops.

APL plans to expand the pilot program to Girdwood, providing laptops at the Scott & Wesley Gerrish Branch Library soon.

Mountain View Branch Library — Under Construction

Library donors and community supporters gathered March 2 to celebrate the groundbreaking of the new Mountain View Branch Library. This \$4.1 million project is part of the Mountain View Revitalization Project.

“Mountain View is Anchorage’s most diverse neighborhood, with over 45 distinct nationalities represented in the area’s elementary schools,” said Assembly member Patrick Flynn. “The new Mountain View Library will celebrate and promote this diversity.”

Mountain View residents have been working to restore a library to the neighborhood since the original branch closed in 1988. The new branch will utilize green building design (on target for LEED Gold Level green building certification)



Representatives from the Municipality, Assembly, major donors and the Native village of Eklutna gather for the ceremonial groundbreaking of the new Mountain View Branch Library building March 2.

and community-oriented programming that reflect the neighborhood’s rich diversity. The library and community room are scheduled to open early next year.

“Great libraries are a direct reflection on the strength and vitality of our community,” said Acting Mayor Matt Claman. “We can be proud of the investment our community is making to create top-notch libraries that transform lives.”

Anchorage Public Library thanks everyone who has supported this project—especially the

major contributors: Rasmuson Foundation, the State of Alaska, BP, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, the Gottstein Family, Municipality of Anchorage voters, the Atwood foundation, Anchorage Library Foundation, Friends of the Library, Wells Fargo, the Carr Foundation and First national Bank of Alaska.

Construction is scheduled to finish by December 2009, with the opening in January 2010. Get project updates at www.anchoragelibraryfoundation.org.

Hours/Locations

Z.J. Loussac Public Library 343-2975

3600 Denali Street
Mon-Thur 10am-9pm
Fri-Sat 10am-6pm
Sun 1-5pm

Telephone reference
562-7323

Mon-Thur 10am-9pm
Fri 10am-6pm

Chugiak-Eagle River Branch Library 694-2500

12400 Old Glenn Hwy
Eagle River 99577
Tues-Thurs 10am-8pm
Fri-Sat 10am-6pm

Muldoon Branch Library 343-4223

Muldoon Center Mall
1251 Muldoon Rd.
Anchorage 99504
Tues-Thurs 10am-8pm
Fri-Sat 10am-6pm

Samson-Diamond Branch Library 343-4049

800 E. Dimond Blvd.
Anchorage 99515
Tues-Thurs 10am-8pm
Fri-Sat 10am-6pm

Scott & Wesley Gerrish Branch Library 343-4024

250 Egloff Dr.
Girdwood 99587
Tues & Thur 1-6pm
Wed 1-8pm
Fri-Sat 10am-6pm

Mountain View Branch Library 272-4867

Under Construction

Anchorage Public Library 2009 Capital Requests

With the relocations and upgrades to the Girdwood and Muldoon branches complete and renovations underway in Chugiak-Eagle River and Mountain View, the Library is seeking funding to complete the next phase of the Anchorage Library Renewal Initiative.

The Anchorage Library Foundation and Friends of the Library continue to raise significant financial support from the private sector. The Municipality has requested funds from the State Legislature and Anchorage voters.

State Capital Requests

The Municipality has requested funding to complete the Chugiak-Eagle River and Mountain View Libraries, begin renovations on the main Loussac Library and renovate a building to create a new downtown branch. The requests are working their way through the capital budget process.

Prop 5: Library Bond

Proposition 5, the Public Facility Capital Improvements Bond, on the April 7 Municipal ballot, will provide funds in the amount of \$1.5M to renovate the entrance and create an



Prop 5 funds will be used to remove Loussac’s stairs and terrace, and move the entrance moved to ground level. Design drawing courtesy USKH Inc.

indoor public commons at the Loussac Library and renovate a new downtown branch. The bond will be matched by \$6.8M in existing public and private funds and would equal an increase in property taxes of \$1.90 per \$100,000 of assessed taxable value. Both the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce and the Anchorage Daily News have endorsed the Library Facilities Improvement Bond. To see those endorsements, go to: www.anchoragechamber.org and www.adn.com/opinion/view/