

# **Siuslaw News**

## **Letter to the Editor**

### **June 2, 2021**

I started shelving books at the Salt Lake City Public Library while I was studying to be an actor at the University of Utah. I fell in love almost immediately with working at the library, and I knew librarianship, not theater, would be my career.

I fell in love with my chosen career for a second time when I moved to Florence and became the Director of the Siuslaw Public Library District.

In this community, I get to work with the best patrons, the best staff, and in a beautiful library that has been a gathering and learning place for our region since 1915. In Mapleton, we have another gem that serves residents all the way up the Siuslaw River to Deadwood.

Over the past year and a half, nothing has changed, and everything has. I still love my job (and patrons and staff!) but Covid-19 dramatically altered how the library operates. Since March 2020, the library has added services to respond to the new reality: curbside pickup; virtual programming; purchasing additional downloadable books, magazines, and reference resources; issuing temporary online library cards; increased Wi-Fi access in our parking lots; online storytime and take-home kits; and in-person computer access. On April 1, the library also reopened for in-person browsing during limited hours at both library locations. In that single month we were visited more than 3,000 times and circulated more than 5,500 physical items.

It has been a challenging time. There have been new cleaning and occupancy requirements that sometimes changed faster than we could. I have hated not seeing patrons in person. It has been hard to close our doors and then to say “no” or “not yet.”

Now things are improving. Case rates are declining and guidelines are relaxing. I am proud that this library is offering in-person service without an appointment --one of just three libraries in Lane County offering that level of service. We are ahead of systems like Multnomah County and Springfield Public libraries that will just begun offering in-person appointments on June 1. Others are open with hours nearly identical to their pre-Covid service. That is because libraries across the state are responding to everything from local access to janitorial services to liability insurance while adhering to recommendations from the State Library of Oregon and OSHA requirements.

And while Oregon continues to open, we aren't back to normal. The last fifteen months have dramatically impacted organizations and businesses throughout the community in ways that won't be erased when the county risk-level decreases and restrictions are lifted.

The historic labor shortage expected with the retirement of Baby Boomers has been magnified and sped-up as millions of lives were disrupted. Help-wanted signs around our region tell that story. At the library, six of our substitute and permanent employees have retired or reduced hours. We are operating with just a few of the more than 100 hundred volunteers that generally re-shelve our materials to maintain workplace safety. As the new budget year begins on July 1, and as our remaining staff has capacity to train employees while maintaining new services and procedures, we will hire. We will welcome volunteers back as we increase staffing and guidelines ease. We will keep expanding hours and services while adhering to changing guidelines from the state and recommendations from the State

Library of Oregon. We will start saying “soon” and “yes.” It won’t be tomorrow, but we are working hard every day to serve you.

In March of 2020, as the shutdown began, I wrote into the *Siuslaw News* about how much I loved the library and this community, and how I was also in love and engaged to an amazing man names Will Yurman. When you read this, I will be on a short trip to the Four Corners region to be married to Will. It feels like another amazing step forward in my life as Covid-19 slowly recedes. More than anything, I hope you are having moments like that as well.

When I am back on June 9, please stop in or call or email if you have more questions. Until we get a chance to talk, please take care, and please visit the library.

Meg Spencer  
Library Director