Welcome to 2018! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. My family was the recipient of these lovely matching Norwegian sweaters from my very Scandinavian mother in Minnesota. I think they will become a holiday tradition at our house! Speaking of traditions, I hope that all of you have a
professional tradition of attending the annual Montana Library Association Conference. Each year, this conference is filled with insightful speakers, fun events, and great networking opportunities for all librarians throughout our state.

This year’s MLA Conference is shaping up to be a particularly terrific one. I chose a legal theme for this year’s conference and many of our speakers and programs reflect that theme. Our keynote speaker is Montana Supreme Court Justice Beth Baker who has recognized for years the vital and important role that librarians play in providing access to legal materials for every day Montanans. Our author luncheon speaker writes fiction, but it’s legal fiction with a recipe twist. Please plan on attending the author luncheon with Leslie Budewitz on Saturday, April 14. There are programs at conference on copyright law, open meetings law, intellectual freedom and many other legal topics that hit close to home for many librarians. I am especially pleased to welcome Helena attorney Ron Waterman to speak at the 2018 MLA Conference. Ron defended the first Montana man who was exonerated from prison for a crime he did not commit.* Ron will be discussing that case as well as highlighting the book Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson.

Speaking of Just Mercy**, I have selected it as a One Read book for this year’s conference. Many in Bozeman will be familiar with Just Mercy as it was selected as the One Read for incoming freshman to MSU last fall. It is an amazing book! I dare say reading it might change your life. You will be able to get a copy of Just Mercy at the MLA Bookstore at conference but it is my hope that many of you will read the book prior to conference so you can join in the eye-opening discussion led by Ron Waterman at his program.

MLA Conference One Read

And one can’t mention the MLA Conference without talking about Cates. The MLA Cates Committee raises money at the MLA Conference; money which will be used to fund scholarships for Montana
In this issue, librarians to receive their MLS or school certification in librarianship. The two big Cates fundraisers at conference are the silent auction (contact me if you can donate an item for the silent auction!) and a fundraising event. I am so excited to announce that this year’s Cates event is a Librarians Got Talent show! Montana librarians are amazingly talented and here is your chance to show it. We need participants! What’s your talent? Do you sing, dance, write poetry, juggle? Please think about what talent you can share to help raise money for librarian scholarships. Contact me if you can participate. It’s going to be so much fun!

I have a feeling that this is going to be a good year for librarians. Let’s all meet at the 2018 MLA Conference and create some new Library High memories—and traditions—together!

NOTES:

*In my day job, I serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Innocence Project, a statewide non-profit dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted people in Montana.

**About *Just Mercy* (courtesy of www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/224792/just-mercy-by-bryan-stevenson/9780812984965)

#1 New York Times Bestseller | Named one of the Best Books of the Year by The New York Times • The Washington Post • The Boston Globe • The Seattle Times • Esquire • Time

Winner of the Carnegie Medal for Nonfiction | Winner of the NAACP Image Award for Nonfiction | Winner of a Books for a Better Life Award | Finalist for the Los Angeles Book Prize | Finalist for the Kirkus Reviews Prize | An American Library Association Notable Book

A powerful true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to fix our broken system of justice—from one of the most brilliant and influential lawyers of our time.

[ Lisa can be reached at lisameckjack@gmail.com ]

- IN THIS ISSUE -

**News From MLA:**
- Debbi Kramer poses the question: Should you attend the MLA annual conference? (Yes. Yes you should.)
- MLA President Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson is putting out a call for donations for the 2018 Cates Silent Auction!
- Mary Ann George invites you to join a brand-new MLA Support Staff Interest Group for Paraprofessionals!

**News From Our Affiliates:**
- PNLA news courtesy of Carmen Clark
- Carolyn Martin of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (Pacific Northwest Region) offers some food for thought
- Natasha Hollenbach of the Montana Historical Society announces exciting new web content! She also delivers some profound remarks on the role of Montana libraries in ensuring the availability of Montana Newspapers online.
FOCUS on Library Paraprofessionals:
- Get to know some of our many wonderful library paraprofessionals!

Features:
- Carol Jestrab reports from the National Access Services Conference
- Debbie Stewart gives us the story of a paraprofessional
- Several key Flatthead School Librarians report in
- Gavin Woltjer gives three cheers for paraprofessionals

Programs, Promotions & Projects:
- Whitefish Community Library brought back its popular "Read with a Dog" program, reports Alison Pomerantz
- Marla Unruh leads a Genius Club at Broadwater Elementary School in Helena.
- Heather Dickerson has word on the Lewis & Clark Library ACT Study Group!
- Come meet Stefanie McKain, the new Medical Librarian at the Kalispell Regional Medical Center, at the KRMC Open House on February 2nd!
- Sarah Creech updates us on the Game On Coding Club at the Belgrade Community Library
- Glacier County Library put together a delightful "Sweet Reads" bulletin board, shares Austin Castle
- Carmen Clark of the Bozeman Public Library has an update on the BPL Bookmobile!

Marginalia:
- One Macro- & Several Micro-Reviews!
- Submissions Open for April
- Kudos to Lewis & Clark Library for 150 Years & a new logo!
- A Tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin
- Editorial Notes

To view past issues or download PDF versions of the newsletter, please visit: http://mtlib.org/Focus/default.asp

Should I Attend the MLA Annual Conference?
by Debbi Kramer, Montana Library Association

Should I attend the annual conference? I know you ask yourself the same question anytime you read on WIRED-MT about an upcoming MLA sponsored event.

It is a decision that can't be made lightly for many reasons. Considerations include being away from library, finding someone to substitute in one and two person libraries, cost, travel distance, and
Here are 12 reasons why you should attend:

1. **Learn new skills.** A sharper saw works better than a dull one. Using that analogy a sharper you will work better than a dull you. You will always return from conference with new ideas to make you more effective and efficient.

2. **Meet library experts and those with influence face to face.** I remember the first time I met the Montana State Librarian as a young librarian. Guess what, they’re very approachable and easy to visit with! Take a selfie and show your Library Board. It is a connection that will pay you ten-fold.

3. **Networking Opportunities.** Social media and WIRED-MT may keep you connected to your peers but they are no substitute for real life interaction. There will be lots of opportunities at the MLA conference to visit with other librarians who have the same concerns and questions that you do. I have never visited with a librarian who wasn’t willing to pass on his or her expertise for a problem that needs a solution. Uncover ideas and spark inspiration!

4. **New Tools.** Every year MLA invites many library exhibitors who come to make your job easier. They have answers to questions you may not have even thought about asking. They offer services to your library that may well save you budget money as well. Invest time with the exhibitors and turn them into your friends and allies. You won't know what you are missing if you don't attend.

5. **Learning in a New Space.** Breaking out of the library and sitting in a workshop room in the GranTree Inn in Bozeman can spark you to trying a new approach that will increase attendance at a library program or event. Break out of your rut!

6. **Step Out of Your Comfort Zone.** We go to our libraries every day and we're surrounded by library patrons and co-workers who are our friends. Stepping out of your comfort zone is just the type of action you need to break out of old ways of doing things. It's time to shake it up and try something new at your library!

7. **New Tips and Tactics.** Yes, by using the web we have everything at our fingertips. At conference you will see new ideas that will help you to improve your programming, board meetings or interactions with co-workers at the library. The sky's the limit as to the number of new tips or tactics you will have access to at conference.

8. **Greater Focus.** Consider becoming a part of MLA as an officer. There is power in being connected to others who are active in the library world. Many people think that joining MLA is enough. To get more out of MLA you need to be engaged and participate in meetings.

9. **The Energy of other Librarians.** There is nothing better than a room full of other librarians who like you want to become a better librarian. Their energy is infectious. I always feel energized when I return from conference.

10. **Workshop Offerings.** MLA strives to select the most interesting and educational workshops offered to help all types of librarians from all over Montana. Maybe the workshop you’re attending isn’t exactly what you expected, but you’re amazed at what you learned and how you will be able to adapt it to your library.

11. **Invest in Yourself.** Everything you learn at conference will help you in your career. Investing in yourself, your career and your library is worth the cost of registration. Your library board will see your
11. Grow Professionally!

Personal growth and your library will see your professional growth and renewed energy. What a great way to get your ideas out to the rest of the library world!

12. Have Fun!

I know you’re thinking that asking for time away from the library to have fun is going to go over like a lead balloon. I understand, but don’t we all deserve some ME time? At conference MLA offers tours, welcome receptions, the Cates Event and meals that will provide some great fun times. Take advantage to do a little relaxing!

I know that conferences are expensive. From registration, to hotel room and transportation it all adds up, but conferences are more important than ever. Where else but a conference do you have such a unique opportunity to network, learn new tips and grow professionally all in a single package? We all need to get out of the library, gain confidence in our abilities and bring back fresh ideas to the library. What an investment! Your return on investment (ROI) will far outweigh your costs!

MLA President Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson has selected “Big skies, library highs, & legal ties” as the theme for the 2018 annual conference. The title really says it all. Living in Montana every time we look up we see the beautiful big skies and who hasn’t experienced a library high. Legal ties are present in all our libraries, big and small.

This year’s conference planning committee consists of Pam Henley from the Montana State Library, Lois Dissly from Bozeman Public Library and Rachelle McLain from Montana State University. These ladies have been working on the conference since last July. They have spent many hours reading and selecting top notch workshops so all attendees have a very worthwhile conference experience. They’ve arranged an enjoyable welcome reception Wednesday evening at the Bozeman Public Library to greet you as you arrive and they’ve chosen two ideal tours for your Thursday evening enjoyment. The committee is still selecting items for your conference bags, filling committees to help during conference and taking care of many last minute tasks.

In order to streamline the registration process, MLA has included four meals into the conference registration. There were two reasons behind this change. Many conferences are now including meals in registration fees to alleviate the need to pay multiple fees to attend a conference and MLA wanted to save our participants money. For those planning to attend the entire conference there will be a cost savings of over $15. MLA has acquired sponsors so they are able to offer all the pre-conference workshops at no cost.

Montana Supreme Court Justice Beth Baker has graciously accepted MLA’s request to entertain us as our Keynote Speaker. Justice Baker was appointed to the court in January 2011 and is a passionate advocate for access to justice for all Montanans and sees the vital role of libraries in fulfilling that access.
Leslie Budewitz, author of cozy mysteries and Montana resident, will serve as the Author Brunch speaker. Leslie has won several awards for her books and blends her passion for food, great mysteries and the Northwest into her novels.

Please visit the MLA website conference link: <http://mtlib.org/mla-annual/2018-conference/>. Here you will find a welcome letter, registration materials, conference schedule, speaker profiles, program descriptions and menu descriptions. You can register online or print out a registration form and send it along with a check or PO. Please take advantage of early registration that ends March 5th and book your room by March 9th to receive the discounted room rate.

Register today for the 2018 conference to improve your professional skills, expand your network, build your library knowledge and renew your library energy!

[Debbi can be reached at debkmla@hotmail.com.]

Calling for items for the 2018 Cates Silent Auction at conference!

by Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson, President of the Montana Library Association
Got a basket, got a box?
To fill with jewelry, wine, or socks?
How about a plant in a pretty pot?
Or maybe it's chocolate that you've got.
Get your colleagues, get your mates
To put together a basket for Cates!

Calling for donations to the 2018 Sheila Cates Silent Auction at the MLA Conference!

The Sheila Cates Silent Auction room is a very popular destination at conference because we always have great stuff to bid on! In past years, libraries and librarians have been very generous in donating marvelous stuff. We are hoping this year will be no exception. Do you have a craft item, art piece, or library novelty that you would be willing to share? We'd love to have it!

We're specifically calling on libraries and federations—band together to put a basket together for Cates. All proceeds from the auction go to scholarships for Montana librarians. We've been able to raise over $2,000 from the silent auction each of the last few years. That is because you all have been donating terrific stuff that others want to bid on. Keep it up!

If you can donate to the auction, please send me a description of your item. Thank you in advance for your generosity, wonderful librarians!

On behalf of the Cates Scholarship Committee,

[ Lisa can be reached at lisameckjack@gmail.com ]

Invitation to All Paraprofessionals!

by Mary Ann George, Helena College Library

Mary Ann George, a Library Tech paraprofessional at Helena College, invites all paraprofessionals to be part of a new MLA Support Staff Interest Group beginning in May 2018. This would be a forum to discuss issues that are unique to paraprofessionals as well as a place to develop related programming. Mary Ann says "I am new to this but I am hoping that some of you out there would like to take on this adventure with me."

The MLA Handbook provides the following information on Interest Groups:

Formation of Interest Groups

1. Formation of an interest group requires a written request submitted to the Vice President before the last MLA Board of Directors meeting held at the annual conference and requires the approval of the MLA Board of Directors.
2. An interest group is identified for the fiscal year, July 1 – June 30, in which the request is made.
3. Participants/members of an interest group shall select their own chair(s).
4. The request for formation shall be made on a form provided for this purpose and must state the purpose for which the interest group is being formed and the activity which the group plans to accomplish during the fiscal year.
5. The Vice President, with the concurrence of the Board of Directors, will identify the interest groups and their chair.

Responsibilities of Interest Group Chairs

1. Interest group activities are the responsibility of interest group chair or designee.
2. The chair is responsible for communication with MLA members with similar interests. The Executive Assistant shall send interest group chairs an updated membership list in April (before the conference) and October (after renewal date). News notes of interest Group plans and activities may be submitted to the editor of the association's publication.
3. The chair shall maintain communication with the Directors at Large of the association concerning plans, activities, conference programs, etc.
4. Budget requests for the fiscal year shall be submitted to the Directors at large prior to development of the budget, which is adopted at the first meeting of the MLA Board.
5. All expense claims forms must be documented with receipts, a brief explanation for the expense, and signed by the interest group chair when submitted to the MLA President for reimbursement.

Retrieved from http://mtlib.org/handbook/interest-groups/

[ Mary Ann can be reached at maryann.george@helenacollege.edu or by phone at 406.447.6943. ]
by Carmen Clark, Bozeman Public Library

I have very much enjoyed representing Montana these last three years. Please consider running for PNLA representative in the upcoming election.

Please be sure to watch updates on the 2018 PNLA conference in Kalispell on our website: www.pnla.org. A call for conference proposals should be forthcoming shortly.

The conference rotation for future PNLA conferences is as follows:

- 2019 Washington
- 2020 Alaska (this will be a joint conference with AKLA)

[ Carmen can be reached at cclark@bozeman.net. ]
Health Programming in Libraries

by Carolyn Martin, National Network of Libraries of Medicine (Pacific Northwest Region)

Promoting Healthy Communities, a consumer health initiative of the Public Library Association (PLA) and National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM) wants to spread the word about the great consumer health-related programs already underway in our nation's public libraries.

If your library offered a health program in the last two years you are invited to submit a brief write-up about the program to ALA's Programming Librarian website. This free website contains a wide variety of program ideas for libraries. Library professionals are encouraged to submit their own programs for publication in a section of the website called Program Models. View the Programming Librarian Program Model database here.

To submit your program for consideration, please fill out the "Share Your Program" webform located on the website. If you prefer, you can email your submission using the Word document provided at the previous link to programminglibrarian@ala.org.

Programs from all library types are welcome. Please limit your submissions to programs that have taken place within the past two years. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Sarah Ostman, communications manager for ALA's Public Programs Office, at sostman@ala.org.

[ Carolyn can be reached at martinc4@uw.edu. You can also find out more about the NNLM at https://nnlm.gov/pnr. ]

- MHS Updates -

New Content Available via Montana Newspapers!

by Natasha Hollenbach, Montana Historical Society
The Montana Historical Society is pleased to announce that new content is available to search and browse on the web site MONTANA NEWSPAPERS.

The Winifred Times is a brand new addition to Montana Newspapers. This digitization project sponsored by The Winifred Museum covers June 22, 1923-July 10, 1936.

The Big Sandy Cultural Fund concluded a second newspaper digitization project, which provides access to The Mountaineer (1921-1936), which is a continuation of The Bear Paw Mountaineer (1911-1921), the subject of their first project.

The Big Horn County Historical Museum in Hardin, Montana has sponsored a project digitizing an additional 15 years of The Hardin Tribune-Herald. With this extension, The Hardin Tribune and The Hardin Tribune-Herald is now available from 1908-1933.

MONTANA NEWSPAPERS, a service of the Montana Historical Society, is freely accessible to all Internet users; no subscriptions or fees are required. To learn about having your local newspaper digitized, contact us at MHSDigital@mt.gov.

You Make Montana Newspapers Possible

In the last issue of Focus, there was a brief article announcing all the new content that has been added to Montana Newspapers since June. It might surprise you to know that this content is available because of libraries like yours. I’d like to give a shout out to the following institutions who have worked with the Montana Historical Society to digitize their local newspapers, making them available to everyone.

Fallon County Library, Baker, Montana
Big Sandy Cultural Fund, Big Sandy, Montana
Carnegie Public Library, Big Timber, Montana
Montana State University Billings Library, Billings, Montana
Choteau/Teton Public Library, Choteau, Montana
Carson Library, University of Montana Western, Dillon, Montana
D'Arcy McNickle Library, Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, Montana
Lincoln County High School Library, Eureka, Montana
The River Press, Fort Benton, Montana
Big Horn County Historical Museum, Hardin, Montana
Corette Library, Carroll College, Helena, Montana
Lewistown Public Library, Lewistown, Montana
Hellgate High School, Missoula, Montana
Thompson Falls Public Library, Thompson Falls, Montana
North Lake County Public Library, Polson, Montana
James E. Shanley Tribal Library, Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana
Roundup Community Library, Roundup, Montana
Phillips County Library, Malta, Montana
Mineral County Museum and Historical Society, Superior, Montana
Winifred Museum, Winifred, Montana

While MHS provides the technical infrastructure, expertise and project management, local organizations—primarily libraries and museums—provide the funding to digitize their chosen newspaper(s) and provide 5 years of hosting and storage, all as a one-time cost based on the number of pages digitized. After 5 years, MHS is responsible for the hosting and storage costs of maintaining access to their content.
Newspapers are one of the most used resources by patrons. From November 2016 through October 2017, the usage statistics show 611,000+ pages viewed on Montana Newspapers. Combine that with 520,000+ pages viewed of the Montana newspapers on Chronicling America (the Library of Congress hosted newspaper website), and it’s clear that patrons recognize the value of historical newspapers. So, whether you are in a school library, and teachers are asking you about primary sources for their classroom, or in a public library with patrons asking you about genealogy or community history, remember Montana Newspapers. If you’re thinking about what resource your community would like digitized, don’t forget about your local newspapers, because fair warning, when patrons ask me why their local newspaper isn’t available on Montana Newspapers, I’ll be sending them to talk to you.

Natasha can be reached at nhollenbach@mt.gov or by calling 406.444.7428.

- FOCUS ON OUR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS! -

Do you know which one of our paraprofessionals:

- goes cross-country skiing ... in order to go caving?
- went digging for dinosaurs?
- FEATURES -

These are just a few of the fun facts about library paraprofessionals you can learn when you look at the results of our **FOCUSing on Library Paraprofessionals Survey**. Click the link to read up on some of our state's many wonderful Public Librarians!

Jestrab Attends National Access Services Conference
by Carol Jestrab, MSU Billings Library

( Carol Jestrab outside the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta, Georgia
Photo by unknown conference attendee. )
Carol Jestrab from the MSU Billings Library was awarded a Montana Library Association Professional Travel Grant to attend the Access Services Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Over 300 attendees from across the United States and Canada converged on the Georgia Tech campus Global Learning Center November 2017. This annual conference began in 2009.

The most beneficial aspect of this conference is spending over 2 days with fellow library access services staff in educational sessions, at poster sessions and other events. Everyone is so friendly and willing to discuss topics at the conference and share their emails for future contacts.

Some of the outstanding 45 minute sessions that Carol attended included:

➢ Reformatting Library Services: Providing Service to Patrons with Disabilities
➢ Badges of Service: Engaging Customer-oriented Student Employee Training
➢ Librarian or Emergency Responder
➢ Welcome to the Rebus Community: Unlocking the Future of Open Textbooks
➢ Investing in Access Services Student Employees: Utilizing Library Employment Skillsets to Increase Advocacy
➢ Instructors vs. Supervisors: Providing Student Employees an Education Disguised as a Library Job

One special event that Carol attended was the Margaret Mitchell House Tour. This is where the famed author wrote 90% of her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Gone with the Wind*.

Carol says “I would like to thank the MLA Professional Development Committee for choosing me as one of this year’s grant recipients. The Access Services Conference is a terrific conference for library staff to attend if they work in access services. I wish that it was located closer to Montana. I highly recommend staff to attend this conference which happens in November of every year!”

A link to past Access Services Conferences can be found at [http://www.accessservicesconference.org/](http://www.accessservicesconference.org/)

[ Carol can be reached at carol.jestrab@msubillings.edu. ]

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**Story of a Paraprofessional**

by **Debbie Stewart**, Great Falls Public Library

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...". The opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities* sums up my thoughts concerning my learning at this juncture in my life. Just like webinar presenters are passionate about what they teach, I am passionate about mastering knowledge as it is fun and relaxing and there is no homework! I have the best opportunity through my job at the Great Falls Public Library for continuing education and work experience to excel and accomplish my goals. The worst scenario would be if I didn’t take advantage of this opportunity. If I want to grow I need to be intentional about it.

Definitely this is the age of wisdom and technology requiring updating, integrating, and assimilating innovation in our communities. Since I am in my "sunset" years as a learner is it foolishness to use my time to pursue a track of continuing education? I have come to the conclusion that no matter age, education, or occupation learning invigorates, builds confidence, and increases potential for creativity.
“Choose your own adventure”, was a great concept for the book series launched in the 1980’s. I love to choose my own learning. With the State library certification program I can choose my schedule, I can choose my topics and I can choose my pace. Feeling self-fulfilled can go a long way in motivating me to become better each day. I don’t need to load myself with lots of knowledge I just need to learn something day in day out. Informal learning encourages me to ask questions. Applying the insights and principles I glean from webinars serves my whole department. An example would be the time I suggested we implement SDA (self-directed achievement). It didn’t work out perfectly in the long run but it’s one of those things that help me to keep on trying to improve.

One of my favorite webinars a few years ago was titled, "What Would Walt Do". Quality service was the topic and the presenter likened Disney service to library service. Everyone is responsible for quality service and to better understand our library users so they will come back, principles and priorities were lined out in the presentation. Among the suggestions: treat each patron like the first of each day, use eye contact and greet with a smile, become interested in their materials and hopefully the patron will leave in a better spirit than when they arrived. The important take I got from this webinar was that every staff member can engage patrons in their own way and all can contribute value.

Most recently there was a series of webinars offered on social media. Part three, “Going Deeper with Social Media” discussed the best practices in growing your library’s social media program. A handout titled Ten Questions for Inspiration About What to Write for Social Media was very insightful. I really liked one question that was asked, what’s one awesome thing that happened at your library this week—something the public couldn’t see? The author mentioned “because of social media, we’re beginning to learn how to be a living, breathing library online”.

Finally there was a wonderful quote on WIRED recently; “Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardent and diligence.” (Abigail Adams) In keeping with the “best of times” I will continue with the library certification program to benefit me and my library, propelling my learning forward one step at a time.

[ Debbie can be reached at dstewart@greatfallslibrary.org. ]

Flathead School Librarians Reflect
by:

- **Margaret Stell**, St. Matthew's Catholic School Library
- **Soozi Crosby**, Columbia Falls High School Library
- **Dana Carmichael**, Whitefish Middle School Library

**Margaret Stell, St. Matthew's Catholic School Librarian:**

The Flathead School Librarians are meeting in Big Fork on March 19. This loosely organized gathering grew from a shared need to learn from our colleagues in the face of lost staff positions and hyper speed growth of programming needs. For the last four years we’ve met to discuss topics such as eBooks, genre grouping, staffing and variance to standards, books, collaboration, and makerspaces. We’ve gotten tours of new facilities and historic spaces. As we gather, we learn about trends and procedures to improve access to varied materials for all our students. Now, more than ever, building a cohort of colleagues is the best way to advocate for healthy school libraries. Below are some thoughts about recurring topics of concern.
Collaboration has been key for me in a K-8 private school and being a relatively new librarian. It began at least five years ago when I made contact with some rural librarians at a library training held at FVCC (Flathead Valley Community College). Since that time, there are now seven of us who strive to meet monthly (with last minute meeting changes due to various things). To be able to earn PIR credits, we set up these gathering through the NWMT Co-op, and each librarian hosts a meeting at our respective libraries. Our first meeting consists of any ‘Aha’ moments and then we set the tentative schedule of topics for the rest of the school year (generally excluding December). An example of topics for this year include: STEM Resources, Curriculum mapping, Library design and layout, LiveBinder, Resources for teaching technology, Battle of the Books, Premium Nonfiction series / vendors / publishers, Book mending, etc. Another way for collaboration (which has also helped), was to become a member of the MLA (Montana Library Association). This group has helped me connect with librarians outside the valley and to the MT State Library - each provides tremendous continuing educational opportunities. I encourage each of you to check out the above mentioned collaboration possibilities.

Soozi Crosby, Columbia Falls High School Librarian:

A few years ago after reading several articles about the move away from the Dewey Decimal system at various public libraries, I thought...why not? In the classroom, teachers discuss genres, some even set up their room libraries to reflect this. In efforts to collaborate with teachers, I decided to bite the bullet and go "Deweyless". Sacrilegious, and scary I know! The procedure took much thought and some things I didn't get exactly right the first round, but with time and trials Columbia Falls High School now has the fiction set up in genres and the non-fiction in categories. The increase in circulation was instant. Students have indicated they much prefer this setup. All good news. At our last Flathead Valley School librarians meeting (2017), I gave a tour of our library to the attendees. This promoted curiosity and encouragement from and for my colleagues.

Without our yearly meetings I would have continued to wonder if I was doing the right thing. The opportunity to collaborate with my peers in a smaller setting then our state-wide MLA meeting has been highly beneficial. Here's hoping that all of you take the time and effort to promote local school librarian meetings so we can continue to improve our service to students.

Dana Carmichael, Whitefish Middle School Librarian:

Incorporating eBooks into a middle school library seemed like the wave of the future when I became a librarian nine years ago. Now I have whiplash from the speed with which school libraries have transformed from checking out eReaders with preloaded content to starting our own shared collection. (I am grateful to the Public Librarians and State Library staff who paved the way for us with their work on MontanaLibrary2Go.) Currently almost 60 school libraries subscribe to a shared OverDrive eLibrary. The introductory pricing has remained the same for three billing cycles. So my student population of 530 students costs me $500/year. This is a significant reduction from our previous contract. And with everyone buying titles for the same collection, my students now have access to four times as many books.
Three Cheers for Paraprofessionals*

by Gavin Woltjer, Billings Public Library

On an average library day the hustle and bustle of the staff is best executed when it remains in the background, behind the scenes from the patrons. When the scurry of activity is observed by patrons it is not unreasonable for these witnesses to think this animation of activity is the byproduct of industrious professional librarians (perhaps even administration!) going about the library to ensure success in the library’s programming, resource or technological offerings, educational outreach or a myriad of other things libraries provide. And should said witness thank the professional librarian for their dutiful dedication, which should be praised as professional librarians are immensely important to any library, the patron may just be thanking the wrong person. The people who truly make a library
what it is are the paraprofessionals, who unfortunately are often overlooked, underappreciated, and not fully utilized to their utmost capacity.

Paraprofessionals are the unseen glue that hold a library together. In most cases it is the paraprofessional who is the first person to encounter an upset patron at the welcome or circulation desks. In most cases it is the paraprofessional who answers the library’s phone and directs the caller to the appropriate person in the library to address whatever need is being expressed. In most cases it is the paraprofessional who will act as counselor or therapist or liaison to the patron who just wants someone to chat with for a few minutes (or longer). In most cases it is the paraprofessional who is the most visible person at the library, essentially becoming the face of the library for many patrons. Most often it is the paraprofessional who helps ensure a positive experience for the library user.

Without the dedication of the paraprofessional to take on assorted roles throughout the average library day, professional librarians and administration would be severely hamstrung. Paraprofessionals allow professional librarians and administration to focus on their areas of expertise while paraprofessionals focus on the small details that can easily be overlooked or neglected but are crucial for the success of daily operations. For instance, paraprofessionals do the majority of checking in books, checking out books, shelving books, running reports, and many more unseen duties. Without paraprofessionals, professional librarians could not take the time to create or perform programs for library users, conduct outreach within the community, partake in professional organizations outside of the library, or “fix” internal library problems.

The abovementioned duties of professional librarians and administration staff are successfully executed because paraprofessional personnel know their importance within the overall success of a library. It is time that all library personnel acknowledge their importance, too. As a Library Director I find it absolutely necessary and advantageous to not only incorporate paraprofessional staff but to also make them the lead on some tasks or library projects. By including paraprofessionals in an inclusive manner an organization is given a fuller perspective to problems, brainstorming sessions, and significant insights that drive creativity, teambuilding, and even mentorship.

Those who work in a library do so because they have an affinity for what a library does for their community. This is inclusive of all library personnel. If you have not thanked the paraprofessionals in your library today, do so. Their efforts, dedication, and passion for the library are equal to any professional librarian or administrative personnel. Use their abilities to make your library more noteworthy in your community.

*The term paraprofessional is synonymous with paralibrarian for the purposes of this article.*

[ You can reach Gavin at woltjerg@ci.billings.mt.us. ]
"Public Libraries, the official magazine of the Public Library Association (PLA) is a great resource for professionals and paraprofessionals working in public libraries. Each issue explores trends, news, programming, best practices, and professional development tips from public libraries around the US and beyond; there’s something for everyone in your library organization. In the current issue, check out the article on "Efficient Librarianship: A New Path for the Profession," where Palm Beach County Library Systems Director Douglas Crane discusses how everybody’s job at the library has changed, how it will continue to change, and what’s ahead for knowledge work in libraries."

Micro-Review

- by Lauren McMullen

You can find the Public Libraries magazine in print at subscribing libraries or online at http://publiclibrariesonline.org/

- PROGRAMS, PROMOTIONS & PROJECTS -

Tales with Tails at the Whitefish Community Library

by Alison Pomerantz, Whitefish Community Library Board
What happens when kids combine books with a lovable, furry friend? Answer: a greater love of reading. Whitefish Public library brings back its popular, “Read with a Dog” program as a way of promoting literacy and generating enthusiasm for reading.

WCL’s Read to a Dog program invites young readers to come spend time with Tuie, a friendly gray Airedoodle who enjoys curling up with a good book and plenty of scratches. The program was created to provide a relaxed and “dog-friendly” atmosphere to help children practice their reading skills. While many children feel self-conscious when reading aloud in front of other classmates, reading to a non-judgmental audience of a canine listener helps build their confidence and improve their skills. By sitting down and reading to the dog, all threats of being judged are put aside. The child relaxes, pats the attentive dog, and focuses on the reading. Reading improves because the child is practicing the skill of reading, building self-esteem, and associating reading with something pleasant. The excitement for reading often carries over to children talking about going home and reading to their own dog, or other pet.

Another benefit is the joy children get from being around a dog. Most children just seem to naturally love animals, and especially dogs.

However, even children who haven’t had the opportunity to be around pets or aren’t initially comfortable being around dogs begin to develop a better understanding of animals. And while this program is of course, geared to helping the children, there are benefits for handlers, too. It gives people an opportunity to give back to the community. By helping children become better readers, volunteers are helping them to become better students, and in the future, more productive citizens.

The library has offered the program in the past, but recently started it again with Tuie, who is Pet Partners Certified and psychology trained. Tuie’s owner Mary Betz says Tuie was born to be a therapy
“She’s awesome with people,” she said. “It’s her special quality.”

Young readers stop in the shelves of the library and pick a book before heading into the Community Room where Tuie is waiting to listen. They settle down together on some oversized comfy pillows and Tuie listens to the story. Some children use the opportunity to complete their required reading assignments for school.

Joey Kositzky, Director of the Whitefish Community Library, said reading to a dog gives children a chance to practice their reading and oral skills in a non-judgmental environment. It can also instill confidence when speaking in public, she notes, and encourages children to read at home to their own pets and encourages them to join Tuie at the library as they become more comfortable.

“Sitting by, reading to, and patting a calm and gentle dog is wonderful motivation,” Kositzky said. “We are excited to once again offer this incredible program to our young readers,”

Tuie is at the library on Wednesdays at 3:30pm for five- to 15-minute reading sessions. Visit www.whitefishlibrary.org for more information on hours, programs and other news about the Whitefish Community Library or Like WCL on Facebook.

[ Alison can be reached at pomerantz.wcl@gmail.com. ]

News from Genius Club!

by Marla Unruh, Broadwater Elementary School Library

Marla Unruh, Teacher Librarian, leads the Genius Club at Broadwater Elementary School in Helena MT. Jessica Sichelstiel is her co-sponsor teacher. The club meets at lunch to work with Lego Mindstorms, run by Carroll College volunteers Bridgette Hughes and Alex Dickey. Electronic and circuitry kits such as Little Bits and Makey Makey as well as Lego Story Starter are also available to club members.

Later this spring a lunch time knitting club will resume. The wonderful ladies from a local knitting club will serve as teachers. Knitting is wildly popular! Watch future issues of FOCUS for more on this program.
A completed LEGO MINDSTORMS® robot.

A LEGO® Story Starter.

littleBits™ at work.

Photos are by Marla Unruh. All students in these photos have media permissions filed by parents with the district.

[ You can reach Marla at munruh@helenaschools.org. ]

Word from the Lewis & Clark Library ACT Study Group
by Heather Dickerson, Lewis & Clark Library

We're really pleased to offer a second year of "Ace the ACT" study group here at the Lewis & Clark Library. This opportunity brings in teens who are motivated and driven, but don't always come to the library for programs. It's great to meet new faces. The best thing about this program, though, is hearing from students who took it last year. They said that because they spent the time in the study group, they felt more comfortable and confident on test day. That's my goal, and it gives me warm fuzzies to know that the group worked for a lot of students.

[ Heather can be reached at HDickerson@lclibrary.org. ]

Come Meet KRMC's New Medical Librarian, Stefanie McKain!
by Heidi Sue Adams, Kalispell Regional Medical Center

The Medical Library located in Kalispell Regional Medical Center (KRMC) is delighted to welcome Stefanie McKain as their new Medical Librarian, working with Heidi Sue Adams. Come meet and greet Stefanie at the KRMC Medical Library's Open House on Friday, February 2nd, any time between 3:00pm-6:00pm.

If you're in the Kalispell area, feel free to come and devour chocolate covered treats and fruits at the Open House. This is a great opportunity to see the KRMC Medical Library and to also meet the new
Medical Librarian, Stefanie. This is the only time the KRMC Medical Library will be open to all who are interested in visiting the physical space.

**Directions to Library**

When at the hospital, there are two choices of entry:

*From the Main Entrance:*
1. Walk past the information Desk, past the piano, past the elevators
2. Make a right on the uncarpeted long hallway
3. Walk almost to the very end of the hallway
4. The entrance to the Medical Library will be on your right, there should be a sign "Medical Library for Clinical Staff only"

*From the Patient Admitting Entrance:*
1. Walk straight back past the Admitting desk,
2. Make a left on the first hallway (it's carpeted)
3. Make the first right, then left again (uncarpeted hallway)
4. The entrance to the Medical Library is the third door on left with sign "Medical Library for Clinical Staff only"

The door will be unlocked. Come on in!

[ You can reach Heidi at hadams@krmc.org. ]

**Graduation Matters: Game On Coding Club at the Belgrade Community Library**

by [Sarah Creech](mailto:sarah.creech@belgrade.org), Belgrade Community Library
Belgrade Community Library was one of 29 libraries selected from over 400 applicants nationwide to participate in Libraries Ready to Code, an initiative of the American Library Association sponsored by Google, which promotes computer science (CS) and computational thinking among youth. Belgrade's project, Game On Coding Club, worked with students in grades 6-8 exhibiting financial hardship to teach CS through fun coding exercises and community mentorship. This program emphasized problem solving, high school graduation, and the pursuit of higher education.

The club was facilitated by mentors from Montana State University. Mentors were selected through an interview process and include upper-division undergraduate and graduate students in engineering, computer science, and mathematics. The facilitators used a curriculum from Google that is designed to teach core computer science topics through a welcoming and inclusive environment that builds positive relationships and attitudes about education. Each session was infused with career information and examples that exhibit real world applications of computer science. The career information and real world applications were provided by the mentors’ own research projects in audio processing and visualization (recording sounds and creating music videos), writing HTML code, using raspberry pi for video recording from a high altitude balloon, and for basic functions like timing stoplights.

Our first club had 15 registered members, with an average of 14 students in attendance at each of the 8 sessions. The program went from November 28th through December 21st on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 4-5:30 pm in the Stan and Joyce Milesnick Community Room. On January 4 the library held a showcase for the students to share with their families what they worked on during the club. Over 50 people attended and there were four external presenters from MSU admissions, Gallatin College admissions, Gallatin College IT program director, and a Wisetail and Alchemy active CS professional. The kids broke up into small groups and had their parents play one of the games they created and discussed some of what they learned, including what they struggled with and what they most enjoyed. Materials related to graduation resources and high school internship and club opportunities were provided to the kids and their families.

Next on the list for this project is attending ALA Midwinter to meet with the other 28 libraries in the cohort, ALA, YALSA, and Google to work on the toolkit that Google will publish at the end of this summer. After Midwinter, Belgrade will host a second session of the club, again with mentors from MSU facilitating and sharing their experience. Prior to the start of the second session, both the first group and the second group of kids will have the opportunity to go on a field trip to a local computer science company in the area.

[ Sarah can be reached at screech@mtlib.org. ]

Falling in Love With Some Sweet Reads
by Austin Castle, Glacier County Library

Here are some picture submissions for the February FOCUS from the Glacier County Library in Cut Bank, MT!
Our "Sweet Reads" bulletin board.

Our "Fall in Love With a Sweet Read" book display!

More of our "Sweet Reads" bulletin board.

(All photos by Austin Castle.)

Thank you very much for your time!

[You can reach Austin at 406.873.4572 or by email at pgclibrary@hotmail.com.]

Bookmobile Roundup!

by Carmen Clark, Bozeman Public Library
We will have a Bookmobile Roundup during the annual MLA conference Thursday, April 12th from 1:30-3:30 and Friday, April 13th from 2:30-4:30 in the back parking lot. Come visit us in the back parking lot and tour small and large, techno or “regular” Bookmobiles, we might even have a book bike on display. Chat with Montana Bookmobile Librarians and get ideas about new programs.

[ For information, please contact Carmen Clark at cclark@bozeman.net. ]

- MARGINALIA -

Submissions Open for the February 2018 Issue!

REMINDER: The submission deadline for the April newsletter = March 2018. Please email your library news, micro-reviews & photos (with captions & attributions) to mlaFOCUSeditor@gmail.com Thank You!

Macro-Review: "Lentil Underground"

by Carole Ann Clark, Great Falls Public Library (Emeritus)
In January it’s traditional to make “New Year’s Resolutions”, often involving a desire to improve our eating habits. If you have not made a resolution yet, why not try lentils? What? Lentils and other “weird” crops like flax and emmer are actual food, not raw ingredients for big food processors, and are often grown by organic farmers using no chemical fertilizers or excess water. They provide their own “green manure”, hold the water in the soil during dry seasons and actually improve the soil rather than deplete it.

When Dave Oien returned to the family farm near Conrad in 1976, armed with a vision and some carpentry skills, he planned to transform his world, starting with a solar collector. The next step would be to transform a grain monoculture into a self-supporting diversified farm that ran on manure rather than chemicals.

A non-profit group called the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) became the common ground for Montana’s infant organic farming movement. Oien realized that providing the right seeds, both for crops and to plow under for soil enrichment, would also “grow farmers”. Timeless Seeds was born and worked with AERO and Timeless farmers to pass legislation to form a state-wide certifying organization for organic growers, and the future of organic farming in Montana became much brighter.

It’s not too late to make a resolution. Look for products from Timeless Seeds and your local organic farmers in your favorite grocery store—your body will thank you and so will your Mother (Earth)!

[ Carole can be reached by calling the Great Falls Public Library at 406.453.0349. You can help support the Montana Library Association by shopping for this book using Amazon Smile! ]

Lewis & Clark Library Unveils New Logo in Celebration of 150th Anniversary

by Patricia Spencer, Lewis & Clark Library
Your Lewis & Clark Library is celebrating 150 years of service to Helena and Lewis and Clark County and has unveiled a new logo in celebration.

Luke Duran of Element L Design, designed the logo for the Library’s 150th Anniversary. Duran drew on inspiration from the Library’s original logo that features the bison head. “We are absolutely thrilled with the logo Luke designed for us,” explains Lewis & Clark Library Director John Finn. “We will be featuring this logo on all of our materials throughout the year.”

To commemorate 150 years of continuous service, Library staff is planning a yearlong celebration featuring author visits, programs, lectures, and classes. A full calendar of events will be available online at www.lclibrary.org once the dates and programs have been finalized.

[ You can reach Patricia at pspencer@lclibrary.org. ]

A Tribute to Ursula K. Le Guin (1929 - 2018)

by Alice Kestler, Great Falls Public Library

Full disclosure: I am a long-time Le Guin fan. I have read some of her science fiction books several times, especially the Earthsea Cycle and The Left Hand of Darkness. It was with sadness that I heard of her death on January 22 this year. Earlier in the month I had discovered her book of essays, No Time to Spare: Thinking about What Matters, her last published book released in December 2017.

For decades Le Guin published books of fantasy, science fiction, realism and non-fiction. In the first essay of the book Le Guin relates that she never wanted to blog until she read José Saramago. His blogs were published in English as The Notebooks in 2010. Saramago wrote his blog posts when he was 85 and 86 years old. What he did with the blog form “was a revelation” to Le Guin. In the month Le Guin turned 80 (October 2010) she wrote her first post. She continued her blog through 2017. Later in that year she collected 42 entries from her blog posts and published it as No Time to Spare.

In her essays Le Guin reflects on “what matters.” She thinks deeply about philosophical issues both large and small. Some of the titles of her essay are In Your Spare Time (of which she had none); Having My Cake; Utopiyin, Utopiyang; Exorcists; Uniforms; The Tree; The Horsies Upstairs and The Lynx. The essays are in four parts which alternate with whimsical reflections on her cat, Pard.

One of my favorite essays is A Modest Proposal: Vegempathy. It is a biting social commentary on our deeply held assumptions about all other living creatures, especially vegetables. Even as she calls us out on killing vegetables without mercy she made me chuckle. Her logical conclusion is that we should all become Aerovores—with the motto “all we need is O (oxygen).”

If you have somehow survived this long in life without having read Le Guin there is an impressive oeuvre to choose from. I invite you to dive in.
From the Editorial Desk

by Kendra Mullison, North Lake County Public Library District

We hope you’ve found something to love in our February newsletter! While putting this issue together, I was struck again and again by just how much flies under the radar in terms of library service, whether we’re talking about the work of our talented and dedicated paraprofessionals, or the many fascinating programs hosted by other libraries in the state, or the work of our partners in advocacy, literacy, research, preservation, and distribution. There are countless untold ways in which library staff contribute to the well-being of their various communities, and participate in the larger regional, statewide, national, and global narratives unfolding around us.

( Frost on snow-bleached grasses in Round Prairie, Glacier National Park. Photo by Kendra. )

If we could celebrate even just a sliver or two of our appreciation for you all each week, that would (and does) make for very long newsletters indeed! Thank you for all that you do, and as we stare down the long months before the ground thaws and spirits rise with the mercury in our garden thermometers, we hope you feel the confidence and excitement that we, the larger community of Montana librarians and library lovers, have in and about you and the vital work that you do.

Kendra Mullison
FOCUS Co-Editor
The newsletter this month offers some thoughtful articles about the important part paraprofessionals play in our libraries. Our survey respondents give us a personal view of the life of paraprofessionals among us. One respondent asked the question “Why isn’t there a Paraprofessional Interest Group in MLA?” She decided maybe now is the time to start one! You will find an invitation to this new Interest Group in this issue. Debbie Stewart, Library Specialist at Great Falls Public Library, contributed an article about the importance of lifelong learning in her life as a paraprofessional.

For those who want to earn a library degree so they can move from paraprofessional to professional it is much easier to do here in Montana now. Until fairly recently it was only possible to earn a degree by attending a library program in person. That changed within the last 5 to 10 years. Now it is possible to earn a degree completely online or with only infrequent trips to the institution that offers the MLIS degree. I earned my MLIS degree entirely online through San Jose State University while living in Conrad and then in Great Falls. There was even an online graduation for our school. See the screenshot below (my braces were removed shortly after graduation).

My first paraprofessional library job was at my alma mater library after I graduated with my bachelor’s degree. Later I was the director for a resource center. More recently I worked a brief time at the Conrad Public Library after I moved to Montana while waiting to find a job in a different field. Five years ago I decided I wanted to make library work my career and was fortunate to get a job at the reference desk at the Great Falls Public Library. My first supervisor here gave me opportunities to work beyond my job description and take on programs that challenged me. Last summer I attended the Summer Library Leadership Institute sponsored by the Montana State Library. All these opportunities helped me become more proficient in my job.

Whatever path to lifelong learning we follow the State Library offers monthly webinars that can hone our skills and stretch our comfort zone. I encourage all of you to take advantage of education events whether you are a paraprofessional or have earned an advanced degree.
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The FOCUS is an official publication of the Montana Library Association (MLA), and is published in collaboration with the members which it serves. You can look for new issues six times a year: in February, April, June, August, October, and December. With an online readership of over 500, the newsletter works to reflect, inspire, and give voice to the vibrant communities that exist in and around Montana’s libraries.

The FOCUS welcomes your input! To submit feedback, articles, reviews, inquiries, and ideas—or to place an ad or provide sponsorship—please contact the editorial staff directly:
Alice Kestler (Co-Editor)
Here's a series close to Alice's heart: Genevieve Cogman's "The Invisible Library" series! Alice holds both the first installment, *The Invisible Library*, and *The Burning Page*, the third installment. The fourth and most recent release, *The Lost Page* was checked out at the time of this picture. Says Alice: "Cogman creates a multiverse in which librarians share a special language that can alter the laws of physics, permit time-travel, and convince others that librarians can do pretty much whatever they want to. The librarians travel from one alternate universe to another by means of any sizable collection of books, all to acquire rare and valuable texts for the Invisible Library. Every librarian ought to meet Irene, Librarian Spy."

Kendra Mullison (Co-Editor)
Kendra with one of her new favorite books, Scott Freeman and Susan Leopold Freeman's *Saving Tarboo Creek*. This is the story of one family's determination to restore a degraded watershed on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, and an homage to the life, literature, and legacy of Susan's grandfather Aldo Leopold. Aldo Leopold authored *A Sand County Almanac* (also pictured), one of the most revered texts in conservation literature, in 1949. Photo courtesy of Heather Miles.

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