



BC Library Association Announces 2019 Library Awards

For Immediate Release

VANCOUVER BC: Each year the British Columbia Library Association (BCLA) invites the library community, partners, and stakeholders to nominate individuals and organizations for awards recognizing outstanding work in libraries throughout the province. BCLA is privileged to present three awards for outstanding work in libraries across the province. The awards were presented at the annual BCLA Awards Lunch held on May 10th at the Sheraton Vancouver Guildford Hotel.

The BCLA Eureka Award Winner: Thompson-Nicola Regional Library

The BCLA Eureka Award recognizes individuals or organizations that have created an innovative approach to address a barrier, solve a problem, provide a powerful new insight, or introduce an original idea in the library world. The Thompson-Nicola Regional Library (TNRD) has operated what is currently the only Mobile Library of its kind in British Columbia. It makes 30 regular stops as it travels across the Thompson –Nicola Regional District serving communities with no access to brick and mortar libraries. Recently the library expanded its rural services and engaged community participation by offering advanced polling for the 2018 local government elections. This service was provided aboard the Mobile Library. As far as we can learn this is the first instance of advanced voting via a mobile library in North America! The partnership between the library and the Legislative Services Department of the local government successfully combined two of the core elements of a healthy democracy: access to both information and to a reachable venue in which to vote!

One resident of a rural community stated that she “loved to vote [at the Mobile Library] this year and hope to be able to do it again [as the Mobile Library people] go out of their way to get here even when the roads are terrible.” Another resident noted that “My husband and I would have been away on Election Day and the Mobile Library allowed us to cast our votes. It was a great way to reach out to rural communities.”

The BCLA Champion of Intellectual Freedom Award Winner: Baharak Yousefi

This award is given to an individual or organization that demonstrates significant advancement of intellectual freedom in the public realm for the benefit of British Columbians, and/or that champions intellectual freedom issues in their library, community, province or country.



In the words of one of Baharak's nominators she is a:

"...passionate educator, civic leader and social activist. Baharak elegantly articulates the immensely difficult and uncomfortable work with which librarians must engage in order to uphold intellectual freedom while continuing to seek and advocate for social justice. With humanity and an unwavering moral compass, Baharak provides thoughtful guidance in developing new ways of understanding the interplay of intellectual freedom with other goods and harms within our communities. In promoting a more nuanced engagement with intellectual freedom in service of all our communities and users, she reminds us of the hard work we must do to navigate social change. When we do this work in a good way our communities benefit."

The BCLA Building Better Communities Award Winners:

West Vancouver Memorial Library and the Vancouver Island Regional Library

The BCLA Building Better Communities Award was developed to recognize an individual or organization responsible for increasing the relevancy and impact of library service through partnership, collaboration, and building trust where little has previously existed.

West Vancouver Memorial Library: Honouring Reconciliation: Hearing the Truth

In 2017 West Vancouver Memorial Library initiated Honouring Reconciliation: Hearing the Truth, a multi-faceted program to expand the community's understanding of local Indigenous history, the impacts of colonialism and its ongoing effects on Indigenous Peoples. Under the leadership of Pat Cumming, Head of Customer and Community Experience, a working group of committed staff started on their own reconciliation paths, participating in reconciliation workshops, BC Library Association keynotes and conference sessions, reading circle facilitation training, online courses and reading in order to gain new skills, a greater historical awareness and cultural sensitivity.

With this grounding and staff development, the Library Board reached out to Chris (Syeta'xtn) Lewis, Elected Councillor of the Squamish Nation. Chris became the Library's guide during the first year of programming, giving the welcome at the launch of the first year of programming, and participating in a deeply thought-provoking panel discussion at the end of the first year.

The Library also reached out to Reconciliation Canada at the start of the program, connecting with Facilitator Charlene Seward, who has since become Reconciliation Canada's Director of Program Development. Charlene participated on the 2017 reconciliation panel and the launch of the second year of programming, and also led the final program of the second year.



West Vancouver Memorial Library initiated the building of a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples, one based on trust and mutual respect and focused on establishing a practice of reconciliation. Members of the Squamish Nation and Reconciliation Canada, through their generosity of spirit and willingness to work with Library staff and Board, made the programming possible.

Vancouver Island Regional Library: Indigenous Voices

Vancouver Island Regional (VIRL) Library's service area is vast and diverse. What works in Sidney doesn't always resonate in Port Hardy. A program that shines in Masset may not have the same impact in Lake Cowichan. But when VIRL launched their Indigenous Voices initiative in January of 2018, they started a movement that touched almost every corner of the library system.

When conceptualizing Indigenous Voices, VIRL staff took a deep dive into what other library systems had implemented, including Elders in Residence initiatives. Elders in Residence programs seemed to work best in large urban centres so Vancouver Island's geography, diversity and dozens of First Nations, each with their own traditions and customs required a new approach and new program. VIRL staff, with guidance and direction from the Library Board, reimagined and created a program that best served and included community members. To help inform their efforts, VIRL staff attended the BC Elders' Conference to speak directly with Indigenous Elders about what type of program would work for them and their communities. Staff also assessed their communities, reached out to contacts, and formulated a deep understanding of what would succeed in a cross-VIRL initiative. As a result of their research and relationships, staff developed a made-for-VIRL solution celebrated diversity and highlighted the range of voices that punctuate Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii.

Staff imagined Indigenous Voices as an opportunity to work directly with Elders from across Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii, and for people to learn from the Elders' experiences, passions, and histories. The entire program would be driven by the Elders. Staff reach out, develop relationships, invite Elders to branches, and facilitate the development and promotion of the programs. The Elders decide what the focus of their programs would be and how they would be structured. VIRL provided the space. The Elders provided the substance.

By year's end, 20 Indigenous Elders had hosted 56 events across 20 VIRL communities to 1,384 total participants. Attendees learned about reconciliation and residential schools, listened to creation stories, embarked on medicine walks to discover medicinal uses of local plants, participated in drum making sessions and smudging ceremonies...and so much more.



The Indigenous Voices initiative advanced reconciliation and forged new relationships and understandings in library branches from Sidney to Masset. The program has continued into 2019.

Indigenous Voices continues to forge new connections, bring people closer and open up new channels of communication and understanding in the communities VIRL serves.

Congratulations to all award winners, and to the many other applicants whose submissions were also excellent and that collectively demonstrate the relevant, important and outstanding work libraries do in their communities.

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