
Volume 15
Number 4
Across the Great Divide (Winter 2009)

July 2014

Everybody Wins: The Story of a Small County with a Big Library

Jeanney McArthur
Sherman County Public/School Library

Arla Melzer
Sherman County Public/School Library

Recommended Citation

McArthur, J., & Melzer, A. (2014). Everybody Wins: The Story of a Small County with a Big Library. *OLA Quarterly*, 15(4), 13-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1259>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Everybody Wins:

The Story of a Small County with a Big Library

by *Jeanney McArthur & Arla Melzer*

Arla Melzer has served faithfully as media assistant at Sherman County Public/School Library for 16 years. After graduating from Sherman High School, she attended Portland Community College. Her previous work experience encompasses program assistant for OSU Extension Service, legal secretary and office manager. Her first priority is her family: husband, Ken and three beautiful daughters, Abbie, Paige and Emily.

Jeanney McArthur works half-time as library coordinator at Sherman County Public/School Library, needing to preserve ample time for her primary passion, art. After graduation from Sherman High School, she earned a Bachelor of Science from Oregon College of Education, with a major in art and a minor in humanities and literature. (Her artwork can be glimpsed at jeanneymcArthur.com.) She and her husband, Mike, have one son, Colin.



Jeanney McArthur (left) and Arla Melzer.

To set the stage ... in 1993, when Arla began her employment as media assistant, Sherman High School Library comprised 1703 square feet including the library proper, a workroom and a modest (read: tiny) office. Folding chairs and tables, a 2-station computer carrel and half-empty bookshelves awaited students. During the preceding and economically-challenging years, whenever the library was without staffing, the room would be locked, requiring teachers to personally manage access and circulation for their respective classes.

But first, a few words about Sherman County, circa mid-1990s. Located in north central Oregon (although commonly referred to as rural eastern Oregon), with a population of 1990, Sherman County held the dubious distinction of being the only domain of the state without a county public library. A citizen's task force findings and an informal survey of local residents revealed a high level

of support for the establishment of a county public library. Then, and rapidly, three very significant developments resulted. Sherman County Court enacted a 1996 ordinance to establish a public library presence in the existing high school library. In 1997, the State Library encouraged these efforts by awarding LSCA funding for start-up costs, collections and furnishings for Sherman County Public/School Library. A 1997 intergovernmental agreement between Sherman County Court, Sherman County School District and North Central Education Service District (NC-ESD) committed the financial resources necessary to maintain and operate this newly-merged, hybrid library.

In August of 1996, when Jeanney began her job-share employment with Arla, the structure and funding for Sherman County Public/School Library was largely in place. Her first daunting but exhilarating task was book selection, given an \$80,000 budget



and about 6 months to complete the assignment. Arla was exceedingly busy with planning and management and everything else that goes into setting up a public library. NCESD and Sherman County School District have continuously employed a part-time, certified media specialist for professional support on a regional basis. Fortunately, a successful partnership with GorgeLINK Consortium for collaborative library resource sharing, circulation systems and mentoring was already solidified at this time. A key membership and partnership with Libraries of Eastern Oregon (LEO) has provided many benefits since our formative years, namely, programming opportunities that we couldn't have individually secured and legislative funding for a preliminary schematic design for a new library building.

Our success story revolves around two big steps, or rather, huge steps. Firstly, the merger as a high school and public library greatly enhanced our status and services. A merger suits our small, close-knit community whereby the high school is the prominent social center of the county. Secondly, the construction of a modern, spacious, 7200 square-foot building, complete with a program room, kitchenette, enlarged children's area, designated computer lab, two private study rooms, leisure reading space, restrooms, separate public entrance, gallery wall and glass breezeway connecting to the high school (which has undergone its own expansion to accommodate 7th through 12th grades) culminated in a Grand Opening celebration in March 2009.

Due to multiple collaborations and increasing community support, we are experiencing strong growth as a library community. At the July 1997 Public/School

Library Grand Opening, registered library patrons accounted for 30 percent of the population of Sherman County. Following the March 2009 New Building Grand Opening, our patron count multiplied to nearly 63 percent, despite a significant decline in the general population. Collaborative library programs currently involve Sherman County Commission on Children and Families, Healthy Start, local Day Care and outreach to Senior Services. Expanded programming efforts have earned "Outstanding Ready to Read Project Awards" in 2000 and 2006 from Oregon State Library. A popular, annual Read Aloud program hosted by Jane Kirkpatrick (founding Library Board member and acclaimed author) is a perfect example of the blending of library services, providing a venue for students, teachers and community members to unite and read favorite literary selections.


Of course, there were inevitable challenges and growing pains along the way. Under the category "Who Would Have Ever Expected?" we would have to list the time mischievous students planted a snake in the return book drop; the incident where one child bit another on the bottom after losing patience at the drinking fountain subsequently producing irate parents to appease; an innocent public patron being mistaken for an intruder in the school; recent graduates hanging out in the library hoping to fraternize with students; and trying to squeeze 67 children and adults into our initial, under-sized high school library space for a reptile show. A worrisome financial challenge occurred when NCESD withdrew as a funding agency due to imposed cutbacks; however, Sherman County Court has magnanimously and consistently

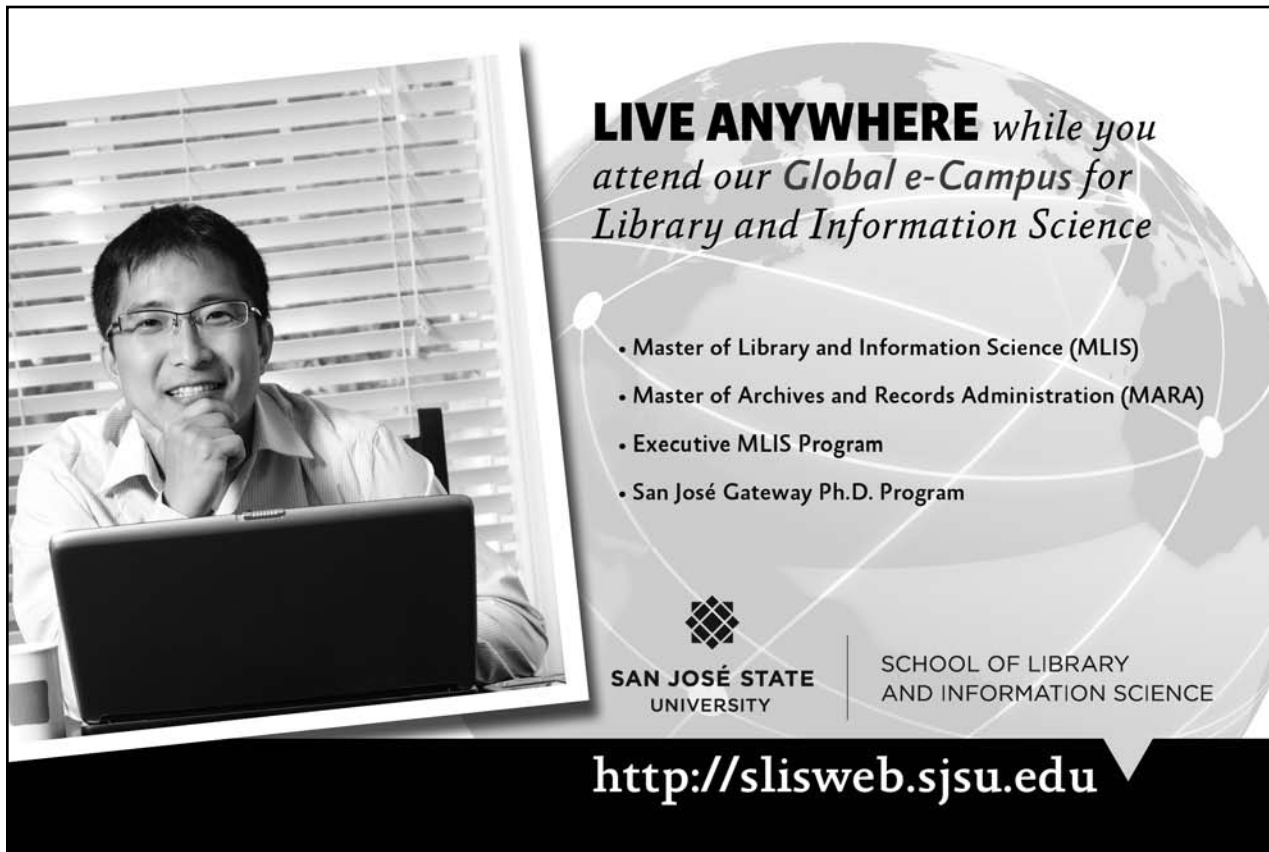


ected to increase their financial obligations as needed.

All of our collaborations, on every level and at every turn, were instrumental to our success. In large part, both the merger and the capital campaign were accomplished under the direction of a progressive, engaged Library Board with a clear vision and a dedicated, mutually-supportive, complementary staff. Private foundations and grantors pledged over one million dollars toward the new library building, Sherman County Court negotiated a donation of one million from a local PGE wind turbine project and local dona-


tions approached ninety thousand. The unwavering support and willingness to take ownership demonstrated by Sherman County Court, coupled with the cooperation and in-kind contributions extended by a School District with a focus on educational enhancements for the community led to a win-win combination.

Our growth curve stretches from being the last county in Oregon to establish a county public library, to fully-functioning as a merged public and school library, to construction of the 106th new public library in Oregon since 1990 ... not a bad measure of success. 



LIVE ANYWHERE *while you attend our Global e-Campus for Library and Information Science*

- Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS)
- Master of Archives and Records Administration (MARA)
- Executive MLIS Program
- San José Gateway Ph.D. Program

**SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY** | SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

<http://slisweb.sjsu.edu>

