

A thankful director bids farewell to library system

I will be retiring by the end of the year as the director of the Amherst Public Library following 33 years of service. But, I will always support public library service as a private citizen. My lifetime occupation, which I have loved since working my way through college in libraries, has been public libraries because I know how much they mean to people and all the services they provide to the community.

These people have given me the gift of their support. I need no other. They are too numerous to mention by name and include library staff members and volunteers, Amherst Public Library Board members past and present, the Town of Amherst officials and employees, and the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System. Although there were tempting offers over the years, I never wanted to work anywhere else than Amherst. Whoever I called, town official or employee, everyone held out a hand of help. No request was ever denied. How great to work in a community where everyone cares and will do their utmost to make things happen. I also am grateful to our Erie County and state legislators. They also care and know how much our public libraries mean to the community.

When I started, there were three Amherst public libraries, which were beginning to show wear and tear — water leaking, walls stained, old furniture marred,

vandalized and scratched. In fact, in two of the buildings there were problems everywhere you looked. Now we have four buildings with beautiful grounds, including the Amherst Main Library at Audubon. There are book drops at each library, which surprisingly was a controversial concept in Amherst libraries when I started, even though they were in use nationwide.

Over the years, many awards were won by the Amherst libraries including: 1992 New York Library Association Public Libraries Section Building Award Program — Honorable Mention, Amherst Main Library; 1998 NYLA, Ethnic Services Roundtable for Outstanding Dedication to Multiculturalism; 2000 New York Association for Continuing Community Education Service Award for Contributions to the Progress of Adult Education; Certificate of Appreciation from the New York Library Association to the director for service as president of the Public Libraries Section, and Public Library Directors Association of New York State. The director has been listed in the "Who's Who In America" for the last several years.

I wish to thank, also, Bea Elye and the Citizens to Save the Libraries, and Jean Stadelman, chair of the Grassroots Group to Save Williamsville Library. Both groups have done much to protect libraries. The Citizens group received an award from the New York Library Association in 1981. I am proud to be one of them now and in the future.

Since this is my last column, I wish to thank The Amherst Bee. If you want to know what is or has been going on, consult The Bee. I never miss an issue. And, this newspaper has always publicized and supported library service in Amherst.

This library service ranks nationwide in the 100th percentile with the lowest cost per circulation, 99th percentile for circulation per full-time staff hour, 97th percentile collection turnover, and 94th percentile for circulation per capita. The new library

director who is selected by the Amherst Public Library Board will be fortunate to work with a group of people who have done so much to achieve these records and success. I feel blessed and privileged to have worked with so many special groups and people in service to the community. With such support, anything is possible. Thanks to all!



MARY F. BOBINSKI

Director
Amherst Libraries

Bobinski (Continued from page one)

she wanted to work in the field and help people. A native of Rochester, Bobinski attended the University of Rochester and received her master's degree from Case Western Reserve University.

"The reason I went into the field is I feel very strongly that we are put on this earth for a purpose," she said. "I love helping people — it's very satisfying, and every day I am helping people."

Bobinski also loves the people who surround her in her work. From dedicated employees to children picking up their first

books, she said it is a feeling of satisfaction.

"We provide a service to the public and have some of the best programs in the county for every age group," she said, adding that her staff is focused on the continuation of the libraries' success.

Bobinski also added that circulation and programming skyrocketed in Amherst — again, a credit to the staff and volunteers because the staff has been reduced by half over the years.

In 1972, the year before she started, the circulation was 617,014; now it has more than

doubled to 1,414,518. Programs in 1972 were few and very limited. In 2005, there were 623 programs and story times for 21,935 children, 78 family programs for 2,422 people, 102 programs for 986 adults, 1,012 visits from schools and 11,804 students in schools who received visits from librarians.

Food for Thought delivered books with meals to shut-ins. There were 33,499 users of computers, and use of meeting rooms by outside community groups for 1,500 meetings with an attendance of 6,546.

"In 2006, thanks to the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System, the libraries are completely automated and computerized. The changes have been almost unbelievable, especially since they occurred during a period of low budget and staff shortages," she said.

After she retires as director, Bobinski said she will continue to be an advocate for the libraries and volunteer where she is needed.

She plans to spend time with her husband, George, whom she met while attending Case Western. He shares her passion for the

field and recently wrote a book about the changes that took place in the libraries in the past 25 years.

Writing is something that took a back seat during her years as director, and Bobinski said she plans to dedicate more time to that following her retirement at the end of the year.

"A gift in my life has been being in a job that I have loved, full of challenges and opportunities for change, with people who have helped, through good times and trying times, achieve the goals envisioned," she said.

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