



# MLA to Z

*The Newsletter of the Maine Library Association*

## *In This Issue*

**Letter from the President,  
page 2**

**Letter from the  
Legislative Committee,  
page 3**

**Letter from the  
Communications Chair,  
page 4**

**Librarian in the Spotlight  
page 7**

**School Libraries in the  
Age of Covid, page 10**

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## School Libraries in the Age of Covid

Resourceful school librarians across the state are finding unique and creative ways to support students and teachers during the pandemic. All of the work we do, from getting books to kids to teaching research skills to promoting literacy to supporting teachers, continues- albeit in sometimes very different ways. *Read more on page 10*



# Letter from the President

## Updates

**Opportunities for connection, upcoming events, Business Manager role**

This time of year we are typically heading off to Sunday River for the MLA Annual Conference to enjoy a few days of learning, networking, and seeing friends and colleagues from around the state. Unfortunately, in these difficult times we are not able to gather in person. However, MLA is working hard to find ways to still connect its members. Be on the lookout for those opportunities. Reach out with ideas and needs for support. MLA is here to support its members through these trying times. We know just as our communities are struggling, so too, are libraries and librarians. What can MLA do to help? Let's talk!

We are beginning to look forward to our Legislative Day in February 2021 and Annual Conference in May 2021. We do not yet know what those events will look like but will be announcing plans later in the year.

As you may be aware, MLA's Executive Director, Jenna Davis has departed her position. Vice-President, Wynter Giddings, and I have stepped in to fill the role of running the association for now. We'll be putting out a new RFP for Business Manager duties in the Spring. We thank Jenna for her years of dedication to the association.

Best regards,

*Jen Alvino*



# From Legislative Advocacy

Sonya Durney

## Join us for Maine Library Legislative Day on Feb. 20

Greetings! Save the date: Maine Library Legislative Day (MLLD) is February 17, 2021. The Hall of Flags at the Maine State Capitol has been reserved for librarians, but of course it is unclear how safe it will be to gather indoors in large groups in February. MLA plans to work with the Maine State Library, the Maine Association of School Librarians, the American Library Association, and others to plan some advocacy training and activities leading up to and on this date. Stay tuned!

In the meantime, here's something to get your advocacy wheels turning. I recently had the privilege of Zoom-ing with Wendy Newman, library advocate extraordinaire and faculty at the University of Toronto. It was a fascinating conversation about library advocacy, and I am so thankful for her generosity of both knowledge and time. Check out [this video](#) of a conversation she had with David Lankes in 2017 about library advocacy, it is so worth checking out if you want to get pumped up about library advocacy! David ends the conversation by saying she is his advocacy hero. She is mine also.

After the election, why not reach out to your local and state legislators? Congratulate them, tell them a story about what your library does in alignment with their policy interests, invite them to have coffee on Zoom or visit your library (as you are able), lay the groundwork to build a positive relationship! Pro-tip: don't mention if you didn't vote for them. 📖

The mission of MLA's Legislative Committee is to advocate for legislation that is favorable to libraries and to empower MLA members to be strong voices for Maine libraries. Whether it's public libraries, K-12 libraries, college/university libraries, or special libraries, MLA endeavors to advocate for critical funding, access to information, local control, broadband access, net-neutrality, the importance of teacher librarians in every school, and to defend challenges to intellectual freedom and the Freedom to Read.

Jeff Eastman

## Libraries provide a sense of place



This issue of MLA to Z was supposed to be the one following the annual conference, which has been at Sunday River for the last several years, long enough for the annual drive up autumnal Route 26 to become my new internal signal that fall has arrived. Without the conference and without my children being old enough for school, our library reopening after months of curbside and closure has become the seasonal transition.

These events (or absence of them), led me to think recently about the importance of place- not any specific places, but rather place as a concept, the idea that the experience of a physical location can be unique and meaningful, and that some places have more or less of the quality of placeness than others. Of the many ways places are shaped and identified, perhaps the most interesting is how people imbue places with meaning through activity and sentiment, and how people read meaning into places, creating a sense of authenticity and attachment unique to that place. Not all places have a sense of place; for example, fast food restaurants and chain motels are specifically designed to feel and look the same whether you're in Augusta or Austin.

Zoom is also not a place. I had used Zoom for meetings before, but because it also became the "place" where I socialized starting in March, the distinction between work and play got a lot more gray last spring. After a few months, we went back to work in our library building, but our programs were all virtual. Some of the virtual programs we have had have been terrific: for example, last Friday I helped a coworker out with a virtual trivia game, and it was a blast. But I like to live and work in separate places. The participants in our programs really miss getting together in person as well. They also feel that coming together in a space has a certain chemistry that makes our meetings unique, that the placeness of our in-person meetings makes them special. Zoom, no matter who is on the other end of the screen, is not a substitute for place.



## *Libraries provide sense of place, cont'd from previous page*

Places have been part of the toll of the pandemic. Hardly as devastating as the human toll but worth ruminating on for a moment: people lost their ability to visit some of their favorite places. For the most part, these places have not died, they have merely gone into hibernation. Some places have closed and will not reopen.

Our libraries are places, places with meaning. And the meanings of those library places add up to more than the sum of their physical spaces, their collections, their staff, and their services. They are special to the people who use them, and all of the unique meanings to all of the individuals who love them are truly great indeed. Yarmouth residents' love for Merrill Memorial Library makes MML a unique place, different but no less special than the library in the next town or the next town after that. After six months of closure and curbside, library patrons all over the state really missed their places.

I feel like I have always been attuned to placeness, and other people are too, even if they wouldn't necessarily put it in those words. I have lost count of the number of Yarmouth residents who have come into the library since we have reopened and remarked about how glad they are to be able to enter the space, to browse, and to borrow in person, despite restricted hours and services. We all notice that our places are special to us.

Unfortunately, it is too soon to have everything back in place. Even as our library was set to resume allowing visitors into the building in September, I wondered how long it would last. A few weeks ago, I asked librarians around the state how many of their operations had had to retreat from open status. Marilla Couch, the Director of the Mexico Public Library in Mexico, ME, sent me her whiplash tale of closing in the spring, opening for home delivery, closing due to her own possible exposure to COVID at church, opening back up fully for a few months, and then closing along with all other town buildings when an outbreak at



## *Libraries provide sense of place, cont'd from previous page*

the ND paper mill in Rumford. She eventually reopened for appointments, but her only other staff person had to stay home because of a positive case in her family.

Janet McKenny at the State Library sent me her most recent stats (also [available on the State Library website](#)): out of 260 libraries around the state, 32 (12%) were fully open, 91 (35%) were open with limited services, 64 (25%) were closed but lending curbside, and only 2 buildings reported being closed completely. More than a quarter, 71, had not reported at all, so it is probably safe to assume that most of them are closed as well. Compared to previous months, we were moving toward more buildings being open.



These have been extraordinary months, and things seem like they will get worse before they get better. The long-feared winter surge appears to have arrived. The week following my inquiry, the state of Maine and the US as a whole broke records for positive COVID infections day after day. The governor again delayed allowing bars to reopen and there is now a statewide mask mandate. Countries around the world have stiffened restrictions against social gatherings.

Will our libraries be forced to roll back services again? Will all these beautiful places, some so briefly reopened to the public, once again need to close their doors? I learned this week that Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick is going back to curbside, and other libraries are sure to follow as Covid continues its relentless spread across Maine. I urge decision makers to continue to take the virus seriously and be cautious. Although we are all weary of the preventive measures we have all taken, this is no time to relax. Our desire to serve our communities, bolster our economy, and carry on in a normal way are natural but this is not a normal time. There is still a deadly airborne disease out there. Remember that the next time your friendly small talk stretches into a full-blown conversation, the next time a proper 6-foot distance gradually shrinks to 5 then 4 then 3 then 2 feet, the next time a patron overstays the time limit, or the next time you sing or laugh out loud while you're inside with other people. It's okay to be firm enforcing the rules. The safety of your coworkers and community is at stake. 🌱

## Jenna Blake Davis

Access and Administrative Services Librarian  
at the University of New England  
and former Executive Director of MLA

Tell us a little about yourself. Where did you grow up? Was there a library early in your life?

I'm a native Mainer and I grew up in Maine, but in different areas of Maine. I don't really have a "home town" in the traditional sense. However, I have always had a home in libraries. My parents are big readers and fans of libraries and some of my earliest memories are from libraries: story hour, new library cards, book displays, etc. I will always remember the kindness shown to me by library staff. I feel so comfortable walking into a library. I know it's cliché, but libraries truly are the heart of a community.

How did you find yourself a librarian? Was it what you always wanted to do, did you have a revelation one day that it was the career for you, did you fall into it?

I joke with friends that I was destined to become a librarian and that I cannot escape





## *Jenna Blake Davis, cont'd from previous page*

libraries. I started as a student worker in my college library, worked at USM's libraries for a period of time, and then thought I should check out other things and worked outside of libraries for several years. While I missed the library world during that time, I did pick up some useful skills, and returned "home" with those skills in hand.

I did always want to be a librarian. I remember speaking with a librarian as a child, asking her what the job entailed, and thinking that seemed like the best job in the world! I'm happy to say this career has lived up to my childhood expectations.

**You have done a lot for the MLA. Can you briefly describe what you did? Do you have any particular accomplishments that you are proud of?**

My time with MLA was really more of a team effort, and what a wonderful team it was! I worked hard with the board to bolster the organization's finances and add value to membership. I am most proud of the organization's growth. There are more members, more engagement at events, more communication, more advocacy efforts....the list goes on. I think MLA is now positioned to become one of the better-known, more prominent nonprofits in the state, which will serve to enhance the voice of this professional community.

**What does a typical day at work look like for you? What would the best day of work look like for you?**

I think MLA is now positioned to become one of the better-known, more prominent nonprofits in the state, which will serve to enhance the voice of this professional community.

I begin each day by checking my notes to see what tasks I need to prioritize. I create a loose sketch of the day in my head, but I leave space for the unexpected. I have an interesting job where I handle the library's finances and also manage the information desk, so something new is always happening, and it's important to be adaptable.

One thing I always make sure to do, no matter what else is happening, is to check in with the student employees. We typically have between 20 and 30 students employed at the Ketchum Information Desk during the school year, with two at the desk for each shift and multiple shifts per day. It's a lot of students and a lot of helpful information! I get so many great suggestions and ideas from them, and I care about their success. It is important for me to make sure they all feel heard and are as happy to come into the library as I am. My best day is any day I get to solve a problem,



## *Jenna Blake Davis, cont'd from previous page*

especially for a patron! For example, I recently encountered a student who needed to find full text for a specific article and was quite concerned, to put it mildly. I explained how our databases work, assuring them we had coverage for that journal, and the patron told me I had “saved the whole semester”. I am not sure how accurate a statement that was, but it certainly made my day. It’s wonderful to be able to share information about library services and know we are truly helping the UNE community.

**Are you reading anything good? Have you read/listened to/watched anything lately that you would recommend?**

Well, I have been doing my best to get my mind off the pandemic. It’s a tough task. What this means for me is endless reading and fantasizing about outdoor adventures with my family. This week I have been reading AMC’s Maine Mountain Guide like it’s a novel. We all have our ways of coping! 📖



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# THANKYOU

# School Libraries in the Age of Covid

Meg Rooks, School Librarian

Meg is the librarian at Lincoln Middle School and Lyman Moore Middle School, the Portland SAGA Club Advisor, the At-Large Board Member for the Maine Association of School Librarians, and a board member of I'm Your Neighbor Books.

Resourceful school librarians across the state are finding unique and creative ways to support students and teachers during the pandemic. All of the work we do, from getting books to kids to teaching research skills to promoting literacy to supporting teachers, continues albeit in sometimes very different ways.

In addition, there has been a focus on accessing digital books. With so many options available, librarians serve a vital role in helping navigate all the different platforms. Heather Perkinson, librarian in Cumberland,




## *School Libraries, cont'd from previous page*

shares that “our work includes reviewing and choosing appropriate digital resources, negotiating with sales people to purchase them, handling the technology logistics for access and reviewing usage statistics to ensure that staff and students are maximizing their benefits.” Tutorials on how to use these resources are also important, and many librarians who have created these share that they have been very popular and helpful at their schools.

Like classroom teachers, school librarians are making excellent use of technology to connect with students and promote literacy. Recorded read-alouds and booktalks are popular, along with Zoom book clubs and office hours. Brandie Burrows, middle school librarian in Yarmouth, says she has been reaching out to students by “recording First Chapter Fridays each week and creating thematic bitmoji classrooms (New Books, Banned Books Week, TeenTober, etc). It’s definitely no replacement for being with the students, but we are making it work.”

Teaching, of course, is happening too, both in person and remotely. Portland librarian Eva Platt, who is serving the city’s Remote Academy this fall, provides “weekly asynchronous lessons to integrate digital literacy lessons.” Many other librarians shared that they are also recording lessons and read-alouds. Teachers are collaborating with school librarians more than ever to help plan, collect resources, and teach. Portland High School librarian Susie Nick tells me “the collaboration is still going strong, but the work is primarily virtual.”

It is very clear when talking with school librarians that our jobs in this new reality are more important than ever. Teachers rely on us to hunt down resources, create guides and tutorials, offer technical expertise, co-plan and co-teach, and so much more. Regardless of whether schools are fully in person, hybrid, or fully remote, school librarians in Maine, like all educators, are reinventing a lot of the work we do, with a continued focus on supporting teachers and students around literacy, research, and technology. 





# What's on your mind?

Your library colleagues want to know!  
Send your submissions (photos, full-length articles, or short shoutouts) to

[MLAtoZeditor@gmail.com](mailto:MLAtoZeditor@gmail.com)

