

Atchison Director Will Receive First Certification

by Shannon Roy, Editor

The State Library of Kansas had a wonderfully fast response to the new Certification Program for Kansas Library Administrators. But PJ Capps, director of the Atchison Public Library, was first across the finish line by several days and became the first librarian to send an application for certification. Staff members who know PJ were not surprised. She had already been recommended for a feature article in *Kansas Libraries*.

PJ Capps came into librarianship after working in business, journalism and freelance photography. She received her library degree ten years ago and worked as an academic librarian, reference librarian and children's librarian before becoming the director of the Atchison Public Library. She is active in the Northeast System and serves on the NEKL Executive Board.

PJ is married to Steve Capps, a government editor who produced the counterinsurgency manual now being used in Iraq. The couple has one daughter, Allison, who is working in a PhD program at the University of Toledo.

When asked about exciting projects at the Atchison Public Library, PJ and her staff highlighted the following as sources of special pride.

- Staff development is a big issue for us. We encourage everyone to pursue continuing education and any training they consider useful. A bonus is given to every employee each time they receive a LEEP certificate. Our staff team is a thriving team. People want to work here so they can be part of something important. Working to be a good example, PJ recently received her level five LEEP certificate.
- Every employee's first two duties are: to see that each patron leaves the library happy and to never walk past a line at a circulation desk. Therefore, everyone has the authority to do anything it takes to make a customer happy and everyone, with no exceptions, is trained to work circulation. People like to have their problems solved by the first librarian they approach, and to them everyone is a librarian. So if you walk past them, they think the library has librarians that don't care.
- Both our in-library use and our circulation have increased dramatically in recent years, 20% in the last year after joining the Nexpress consortium and putting our catalog online.
- Technology has played a large part in our success. We offer free computer classes because technology is worthless if patrons can't use it. We are also very proud that we have gone from three to 20 public access computer stations. We added four computers exclusively for those 12 to 18 years of age. We've also been experiencing a surge in people using our wireless access for laptops. Tables that incorporate electrical outlets are on the way, hopefully eliminating those power cords strung around the library.
- We are very proud of our new blog-based webpage, www.atchisonlibrary.org, which takes advantage of KLOW (Kansas Libraries on the Web). We've just made a story time

available online, and also via a direct-dial phone line. Using a digital camera, we hope to soon add a virtual library tour. What was just a token webpage is evolving into a virtual branch.

- Our *Preteenology* program targets older elementary students, who receive a postcard invitation each month announcing the current theme. Recent programs have included Egyptology (hieroglyphics and an archeological dig); Soap, Slime, and Science (science experiments); and Knights, Dragons, and Wee Fairies (preteens made knight shields and fairy habitats to attract fairies). We have a very active Young Adult Summer Reading Program. Young adults not only read our graphic novels, they help select them.
- We believe in adult summer reading programs. (Gas coupons are great prizes.) Last year we hosted several local history programs accompanied by a light dinner. Kick-off (by popular demand) is a mystery party. People dress like characters in the story and play a character. Last year the “best actor” died early in the festivities and stayed that way for quite a while despite some really awful jokes.
- We just completed our fourth *One City, One Book*. Kick-off events included period art, music, and food. This year we discussed *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, in the library, local restaurants, private homes, senior centers, and the juvenile corrections center.
- Some major problems we have experienced include facility issues – especially moisture problems. We wrote grants and solicited for a three-year building repair campaign. We’re making good progress toward fixing those problems with re-grading, roof and gutter work, tuck-pointing, and mold abatement. We will also be addressing some ADA issues.
- Space issues continue to haunt us. We addressed this first by defining our purpose, finally settling on a primary role as a popular lending library. That decision allowed us to reconsider the allocation of our best “library real estate” to nonfiction. Since the rise of the Internet, much of our older nonfiction just wasn’t circulating. So we made a decision to heavily weed our nonfiction collection and flip our fiction and nonfiction sections. We’ve also taken the unorthodox approach of doing away with a distinct reference collection. We intershelve and circulate everything except a very few items clearly marked non-circulating.
- Many of our successes have resulted from developing a highly effective board and a good relationship with city staff. Our mill levy has been increased by two mills and that is helping us reach our goals.