



MILA to Z

The Newsletter of the Maine Library Association

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It's hard to believe that it's been more than six months since our last quarterly newsletter. If you've done the math, of course, you will have come to the correct conclusion that we did not send our usual April issue. And yet, so much has happened, socially and politically, it's hard to believe it has only been six months. A paradox of perception, perhaps.

In this issue, we mark the start of term for MLA's new president, Wynter Giddings, who begins her two-year term in August. We chat with the MLA Outstanding Librarian of the Year, Janet McKenney, director of Library Development at the Maine State Library. Jeff Eastman, our communications chair, ponders a library's role in fostering and facilitating community conversation. Welcome to MILA to Z, Summer 2021. 

Letter from the President

Wynter Giddings



I am just beginning my two-year term as MLA President, and I'm very excited to continue the work started by my predecessors and to build momentum around some newer areas of focus for the association. Our regular board meetings will be every month, and as always, these meetings are open to members. The board will have a closed annual retreat/planning session in August, which will be the first in-person meeting since February 2020!

Our August meeting is when we start getting to know our newest board members, discuss goals for committees and interest groups, and talk about the board's broader priorities for the upcoming year. This year we will discuss building upon the development and networking programs we offer to membership. We will also talk about the work we want to do around library workers' compensation, which might include doing a wage study and producing some recommended wage guidelines for librarians and library workers.

Another area we will focus on is our state library ecosystem. Past President Jen Alvino served on the ALA task force that developed a State Ecosystem Toolkit, which defines the ecosystem as "the interconnected network of all types of libraries, library workers, volunteers, trustees, friends, foundations, and associations that provide and facilitate library services—for communities; K–20 learners; college and university communities; local, state and federal legislatures and government offices; businesses; nonprofits; and other organizations with specific information needs". The MLA board will begin with an assessment of Maine's library ecosystem by working through the Ecosystem Continuum Rubric, Self-Assessment Checklist, and agenda-building worksheets. These materials are all based upon four pillars of a healthy ecosystem: leadership, communication, collaboration, and sustainability. It is my hope that using these tools will help MLA to be better collaborators with the Maine State Library, with the Maine Library Commission, with libraries of all types around the state, and most importantly, with our members.

Finally, as part of our ongoing project to formalize the association's business practices after becoming a 501(c)(3), we have just onboarded our new Association Administrator, Bob Scheier. We have contracted with the New England Library Association (NELA) for Bob's services, which he also provides to the Connecticut Library Association. We are very excited to have Bob and his wife Michelle taking over our day-to-day administrative and bookkeeping duties and are confident they will do a wonderful job for MLA. 

from the Communications Chair

Jeff Eastman



We did not send a newsletter in April, so we apologize to anyone who feels like they missed out on their quarterly fill of fun and good cheer from your friendly professional state library association. As Wynter said in her first column as MLA President, there has been a change of administration and there are new people on the board. If you would like to be involved, too, please reach out or join us at an upcoming event. It's a great way to get to know other librarians from around the state.

There has been a change of administration in the White House, as well (Inauguration Day was just before the last MLA to Z came out), and, as you recall, the transition was not smooth. Besides the January 6 events and the cloud of disinformation surrounding them, a less violent assault on democracy has taken place in state houses across the country and at the Supreme Court, whose rulings on cases this spring are effectively “making it easier to buy an election and harder to vote for them,” in the words of journalist Ari Berman. Lucky for us, Maine laws allow same-day registration, early voting, and ranked-choice voting, so voting is easy, and our election results are probably accurate reflections of the true will of voters.

These recent national events suggest that we are at a pivotal point in history, and as a public librarian, I struggle with how to talk about it. A commitment to truth, honesty, peace, and democracy, should be non-partisan, and libraries, as institutions of knowledge, inquiry, openness, and equality, should stand for those principles without controversy. What that means practically, however, is not always clear to me. In a charged and polarized political environment, simple questions, statements, and actions can be misinterpreted, so I suppress my opinions around people who might disagree, for the sake of avoiding politics, especially while I'm at work. I don't know if that is the right thing to do though.

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I view these recent events as threats to democracy, not trivial matters of partisan

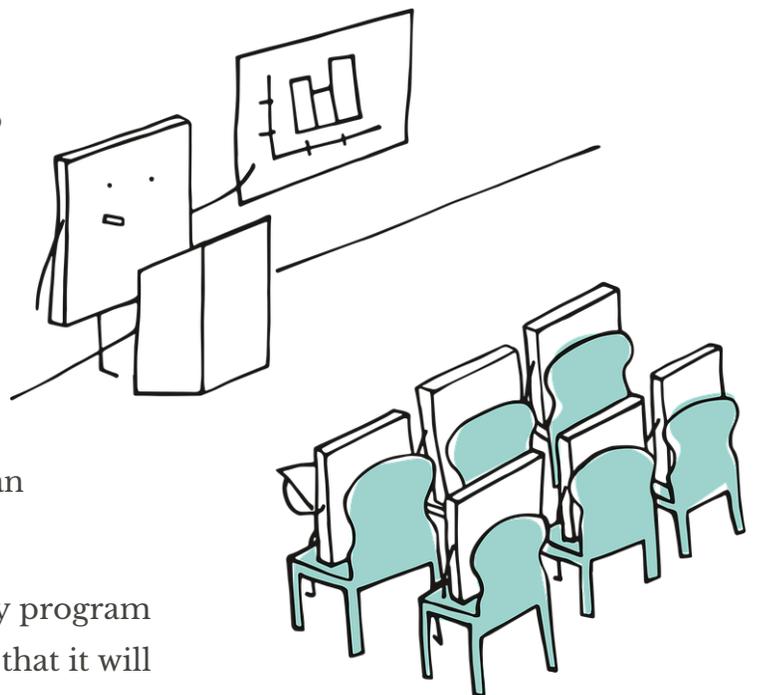
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disagreement. One of our major political parties is resorting to anti-democratic measures to retain power, and that goes beyond politics into the realm of human rights. Shouldn't I speak out? Or am I being alarmist?

Following the events of January, I started putting together a program at my library to talk about democracy, government, history, and civics. I asked a number of local lawmakers and educators to come together over a few evenings to discuss the Constitution, self-government and federated powers, our rights and responsibilities as citizens, the roles of various institutions, recent events, and how our society had changed over time. I wanted to ask whether patriotism and criticism of one's country are contradictory. I wanted it to be a forum for everyone to learn from each other what citizenship, nationhood, and freedom mean to us. I wanted it to be fairly informal, panel discussions rather than lectures, all ages, and I wanted attendees to be able to ask the panelists questions. Unfortunately, not all the elements for this program gelled, so I will try again in the fall.

But I do have misgivings. Is the library the right venue for this type of event? Who would the program reach, and who would be left out? Will the same group of educated, engaged, and upright residents of our town who attend every library event be the only ones to come, or will it attract some people who don't often come to the library, who don't necessarily read a lot, who might not have had a civics class in high school who don't vote in every election, who are confused about the signals they have been receiving from different directions, who don't know whom to believe, who are not good at telling truth from fiction? Is it possible to reach all the relevant people, or is the gap between us too wide, our fragments too small and scattered? I wonder if it would work better in more diverse communities than the one I work in.

I am under no illusion that a little library program will prevent the next January 6 event or that it will



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convince protest sympathizers suddenly to recognize their own follies, but I do think that people have wanted answers to their questions about democracy and the government after they witnessed things go so horribly wrong last winter. I must believe that libraries could play a role in facilitating community conversations, or else I would not be writing about it here. I must believe that reaching the whole community is possible, because public libraries are not only for the people who vote like me. Even though the future does not always look bright, I must be convinced that talking about difficult issues honestly can bring about some amount of good.

The fall seems like an appropriate time to talk civics and government. Even in off years like this one, the spirit of elections and early American history fills the air. September 17 is Constitution Day; September 28 is National Voter Registration Day (perhaps you saw EveryLibrary's post on MELIBS recently pressing libraries to participate). It could be a great program, especially if I could get teachers involved and bring together young and old people in the audience. If other librarians would consider hosting similar programs and discussions, please invite me, because I would be very curious to hear what people in other communities have to say. 📖





WRITE TO US.

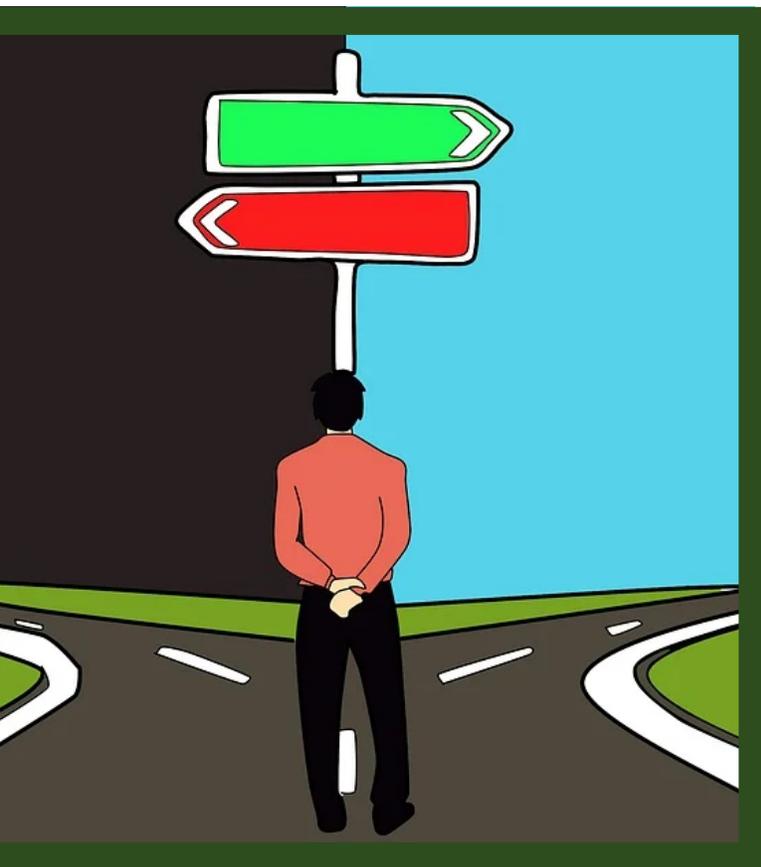
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Tell us what's happening at your library. New programs. Innovative ideas.
Letters to the editor. Photos. Long articles. Short shoutouts.
We want to hear from you.

Janet McKenney

Director of Library Development Maine State Library

The 2020 annual MLA conference was precluded by COVID last fall, so instead we held a virtual conference in May of 2021. Every year before the conference, we take nominations for an Outstanding Librarian of the Year award, and we give the award to the recipient at the conference.



This year, we gave the award to Janet McKenney, Director of Library Development at the Maine State Library, and we received overwhelming support for her nomination from librarians from across the state. The most common sentiment expressed in the support letters was gratitude for the guidance, leadership, and reassurance that Janet showed throughout the COVID year in her weekly Zoom updates. We conducted an email interview following the conference.

How did you get into the library field? What was it that attracted you to a career in libraries?

Growing up I loved my local Boston Public Library branch. It was in a Brownstone in Allston, third floor next to the local FBI office! My path

actually began during my first job out of college. I was working at an organization called the Financial Accounting Standards Board in Connecticut. I was a Project Research Assistant. I was assigned a special project in the corporate library to learn and search through annual reports in a database from Mead Data Central. [It was] costly per hour and [had] this weird silver paper printout. I was sent to New York for a day of training and then the librarian

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The most common sentiment expressed in letters of support for Janet's nomination was gratitude for the guidance, leadership, and reassurance that she showed throughout the COVID year.

encouraged me to go to library school. Southern CT State University started offering classes at the Ferguson Library in Stamford. I took a class and then finished my MLS part-time over the course of 3 years. I loved research, and I was hooked on computers ever since. My program was geared to special libraries.

What was your first library job? What was your path to the Maine State Library?

My first job after graduating from library school was at the Connecticut Hospital Association. It was part-time and I was the sole special librarian in charge of research and records retention. I had taken a Medical Reference course during my library program so had experience with MEDLINE. At the time, in the early 1980s there was this new emerging disease, AIDS. I was tasked to research all literature for the Hospital Association so they could pass along to hospitals. I was only there for a short time before I had to move to Illinois. I was lucky to get a job at the public library in Naperville, IL. I was their first business reference librarian. My path to MSL was through my work as the MSLN [Maine School and Library Network] Circuit Rider and an opening as the Technology person who also did e-rate for the early days of MSLN. Then I became Acting Director of Library development when Linda Lord became State Librarian.

What do you do at the State Library? What has been your proudest accomplishment (besides, of course, winning this award)?

MSL has three divisions and as Director of Library Development, I am responsible for federal funds (Library Service and Technology Act, or LSTA), all federal programs, and the services provided statewide to all library types: all the specialists/liasons, van delivery and ILL, funding and services through Maine InfoNet and MSLN — basically, statewide infrastructure, resource sharing and continuing education. The mission is to make Maine libraries stronger.

Spotlight: Janet McKenney

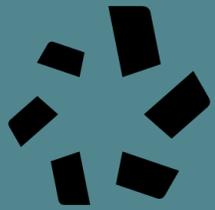
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If there is another Janet McKenney living in a parallel universe, what is she doing with her life?

Oh I'd be a detective or a forensic investigator! I actually started my undergraduate degree as a nursing major but quickly moved to an English major. I blame Cherry Ames books.

Have you read/watched/heard anything recently that you are raving about?

I binged season 7 of Harry Bosch. I recently finished Stacey Abrams' *While Justice Sleeps*. I devour detective series, police procedurals and some historical fiction. I am currently reading through the Clive Cussler Isaac Bell series for my summer fun reads. On my next to read list is *The Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray. Classics...all Tolkien. 



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The Maine Library Association is grateful to the support of Thorndike Press, who will donate a selection of large-print books to the Maine State Library in honor of Janet's spotlight. Located in Waterville, Thorndike Press has been publishing large print for over 30 years.

THANKYOU

Youth Services

Danie Fortin, YSS Chair

The Maine Library Association Youth Services Section is excited to introduce our new board members! This is the second cycle of a full slate of officers, and we are thrilled to be representing youth librarians for MLA.

Returning as chair for 2021 is Danie Fortin from the McArthur Public Library. Joining as vice-chair is Mary Beckett from the Edyth Dyer Library. Jessie Trafton from the Skidompha Public Library is our new secretary. Our two members-at-large are Deanna McNamara from the McArthur Public Library and Jon Roy from the Kennebunk Free Library. Samantha Cote from the Windham Public Library is our past chair. Kathleen Wirth from the Saco Schools is the Lupine chair, and our Reading Round-Up liaison is Kaya Chase from the Auburn Public Library.

YSS Board Members meet monthly to discuss ways we can serve and assist youth services library staff in Maine. Some of our past projects have included Beg, Borrow, & Steal, youth services chats, a Dungeons & Dragons workshop, sessions at the MLA Conference, and more. YSS also helps maintain the Maine Youth Librarian Facebook group. You can find it at [facebook.com/groups/MaineYouthLibrarians](https://www.facebook.com/groups/MaineYouthLibrarians). If you are interested in finding out more about YSS or are thinking of joining send us a message at MLA.YouthLibrarians@gmail.com. 



Has your library hosted a great program, received a grant, or hired a great new staffer? We want to hear about it!

Send your announcements and photos to MLAtoZeditor@gmail.com.

Updates from ALA

Kara Reiman, ALA Councilor

Another (and most likely last) virtual ALA conference has come and gone. It was chock full of celebrity authors and committee meetings. They had everyone from Danny Trejo to David Copperfield.

My personal highlight of conference was former President Obama at the closing session. His soothing voice was a balm to my soul. (I may have bought his new book while he was still speaking).

To get recaps of many of the sessions, [American Libraries](#) archives them for us. In January, ALA will be introducing the brand new event taking the place of Midwinter. It's called LibLearnX and will focus on professional development and networking. The inaugural event will be in San Antonio. No specific programming has been released yet, but follow the updates on the [website](#) (alaliblearnx.org). 



For more news and updates: ALA.org