President's Letter

by Kevin Unrath

Thank you for the honor of leading the Vermont Library Association this year. I feel lucky to have the support of a wonderful past president, Amy Olsen, who has and is guiding me in this transition. I also feel lucky we have a wonderful vice president, Mike Roy, as well as great leadership on the executive board, in the committees, sections, and roundtables. Finally, thank you to the librarians, staff, Friends, trustees, and institutions who are VLA members and keep our organization strong as we work to serve Vermonters.

This year presents the twin challenges of responding to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and responding to the call for institutional change to uproot racism and recognize the inequalities it created and continues to perpetuate. At our VLA board retreat in June, we made the decision to focus on these two topics throughout the year, through a renewed focus on advocacy and anti-racism.

I encourage you to read VLA Past President Amy Olsen’s discussion of advocacy later in this newsletter. When thinking about our varied responses to COVID-19, I also encourage you to remember that our libraries are as diverse as the communities they serve, with different budgets, facilities, patron characteristics, and staffing structures. The availability of e-resources and connectivity for patron access to those e-resources is wide-ranging. The level of the virus in one community or region may be wildly different than its neighbor, and also wildly different than it was last week or will be next week. Our response needs to take this diversity into account as libraries all work to balance safety with service: we can only advocate with a unified voice for libraries if we first recognize and honor our differences.

In the wake of George Floyd’s killing in late May, our nation has been reminded once again that racism not only impacts us historically but is still part of everyday existence for black Americans and all people of color. VLA joined other associations in condemning racism as a first step (https://www.vermontlibraries.org/vla-statement-condemning-increased-violence-and-racism-towards-black-americans-and-people-of-color), but plans to spend the next year providing in-depth programs so that libraries around the state can continue the conversation. The first program in a five-part series “Anti-Racism at Your Library” will be held this Thursday, August 6th from 2:30-3:45 via Zoom; details for registration should be out on the listservs as this newsletter is published. To register in advance: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYkc-0TMvGdQv__OJP5PqZ00lubpKUnL3. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. We will discuss some successful approaches to programming, and also look at promising developments on the state level.
Did you miss previous issues of the VLA News? Don’t despair! You can read them on the VLA website!

Meet Your Leaders

VLA is here to help you. The people who make up the Executive Board, Section & Committee leaders and Representatives volunteer their time for VLA because they feel that it is important to be involved in an organization that benefits Vermont librarians and their profession as a whole.

Below is a list of your VLA leaders (for more contact information, see the VLA Leadership Directory). Let them know if you would like to be involved in VLA, too!

Executive Board

Kevin Unrath
VLA President
Director, Pierson Library
vermontlibrariespresident@gmail.com
802-264-5017

Vermont Library Association
PO Box 803
Burlington, VT 05402

Connect With Us:
Website: www.vermontlibraries.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/VTLibraryAssociation
Twitter: twitter.com/@VLAlib
Instagram: instagram.com/vlalib
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/groups/Vermont-Library-Association

Past President's Letter

by Amy Olsen

Dear VLA members,

As libraries continue to move forward through this pandemic, we know that it is as important as ever to advocate for our libraries, our staff, our communities, the services we provide, and for the work that we continue to do.

Advocacy is hard work. Not only must we advocate in our communities in general, but also with our trustees and governing boards and with our local government. It can feel overwhelming. Some ideas that I’ve found helpful:

• **Focus on the services you ARE providing.**
  For example, when someone asks me: When is the library going to open? I say something like: “The library IS open for curbside. We’re holding virtual and outdoor programs. We installed a Wi-Fi extender to expand our internet reach. We’re answering reference questions on the phone and by email, plus we’re printing copies for folks. Our Friends group re-opened their little free library too!”

• **Reach out to your community partners.**
  I’ve heard from so many of you about the innovative collaborations you’ve worked on with your community partners over the past months. Check in with all of your partners. Even if you don’t have the bandwidth to work actively with them all right now, it’s important to let them know you’re thinking of them and are supporting them. This type of outreach will pay off if you need to lean on them later.
When community members ask how it's going at the library, be ready to tell them! Let them know how busy you've been; that your community continues to benefit from the library through connectivity, access, advice, outreach, research, social check-ins, innovative programs, the work you're doing with partners...

Communicate, communicate, communicate! Signs outside the library, in the windows, on the doors; newspaper articles; Front Porch Forum; website; social media; local radio announcements; emails to local leaders giving updates; phone conversations with patrons… Share stories/vignettes/testimonials of support from your patrons. I hope you're all hearing from your beloved patrons who let you know that what you're doing matters to them! Spreading those positive messages will remind people that the work you're able to do right now is making a difference.

Train your trustees and Friends to advocate for the library. I send a weekly email to my trustees to keep them updated. I've been giving our Friends group some updates and information so that they can use their influence to advocate. Part of advocacy is to shape the message and inform opinions. Make sure your trustees and Friends understand the message you want the community to hear.

Ask for help from VLA board members and other colleagues. Sometimes the work of advocacy is too much and you need help. VLA is here to help uphold librarianship in Vermont and support our members. We're here to advocate for all Vermont libraries all of the time.

The American Library Association (ALA) has a page on advocacy and policy that can offer some ideas too: http://www.ala.org/tools/covid/advocacy-policy

Libraries are here to serve everyone. Everyone. We know that when our communities are struggling, people reach out to us more than ever. They trust us. The pandemic has shifted how we have traditionally served our public; however, we are continuously adapting our services to meet the ever changing needs of our communities. Spread that message.

With care and in acknowledgement for the hard work you're doing,

Amy Olsen
VLA Past President
Library Director, Children & Youth Services Librarian, Lanpher Memorial Library
hydeparklibrary@yahoo.com

We have openings on the VLA board!

by Amy Olsen

If you are interested in any of the following positions, please contact VLA President Kevin Unrath at vermontlibrariespresident@gmail.com

Our treasurer, Susan Smolinsky, would like to mentor someone to be the next treasurer. The treasurer is a member of the VLA executive board. If you have a skill set that is conducive to the work of a treasurer, or know someone who does, and want to be part of a fun leadership team, please let us know!

Conference committee chair. Our next conference will be virtual, and we're looking for someone to lead a committee to organize it. The conference committee chair
Adriene Katz Organizes workshops and assists library trustees.

Committees

Government Relations Chair: Margaret Woodruff
Assists libraries with connections to legislators.

Intellectual Freedom Chair: Mary Danko
Assists librarians with challenges to library materials and issues related to patron privacy.

Scholarship & Awards Chair: Lisa Milchman
Oversees VLA awards and scholarships.

Vermont Library Conference Chair: VACANT

Roundtables

Inclusion Chair: Bridget Stone-Allard
Supports libraries in providing better service to diverse populations.

Personnel Chair: Sarah Snow
receives a stipend for the work they do and is a voting member of the VLA board.

Roundtable Chair Openings

Our roundtables meet as often as they feel necessary and have flexibility in how they operate, including the ability to ask the board for support to carry out initiatives. They report to the VLA board so that the board can be better informed about the needs of our members.

We are currently looking for people to chair the following roundtables:

• Youth services
• Sustainability
• Health info.

Public Libraries
by Dana Hart

Greetings from the Ilsley Public Library! I am thrilled to be joining VLA as the vice president of the VLA Public Library Section. Public libraries are navigating the difficult questions of how and when to reopen, which services can be provided safely, and how to manage budget reductions. Each library must navigate these challenges and answer these questions based on what best fits their community's needs, but I have been uplifted by the outpouring of support and encouragement on the LibStaff library listserv (https://libraries.vermont.gov/services/news/listservs) over the past several months.

Ilsley began offering outside pickup service on June 1, and the response from the community has been overwhelmingly positive. We are circulating many more materials via outside pickup than we anticipated -- about 20% of our usual circulation of physical materials. In keeping with the trend many public libraries have observed, our circulation of digital materials has increased significantly. Since we couldn’t collect fines during the library closure, we decided to temporarily go fine free. The board was already leaning towards eliminating fines, and this has provided a welcome trial period.

About half of the library staff was temporarily furloughed at the beginning of the Stay Home, Stay Safe executive order. In August, these staff members will return to work, allowing Ilsley to move on to our second phase of reopening. We will open part of the building for browsing of new materials and computer use, although our hours will still be significantly fewer than they were pre-COVID. Middlebury College is not allowing work-study students to work off campus this fall. Ilsley relied on about 60 hours a week from our work-study students, and their absence will shape what our reopening looks like this fall.

Sharing our plans for reopening and being able to learn from each other is part of what makes the Vermont public library community so strong. I look forward to continuing these conversations with all of you in the coming year.

Dana Hart
VLA Public Libraries Section Vice President
Director, Ilsley Public Library
dana.hart@ilsleypubliclibrary.org

Friends & Trustees
Scholarship & Awards

by Lisa Milchman

With so much going on in the world and in our Vermont communities, now more than ever we need opportunities to learn and connect, and VLA wants to help provide you the means to do so.

This period of late summer and fall is traditionally a busy time in the VLA Scholarship & Awards Committee as we are ordinarily gearing up for both the fall Professional Development Grant and the Graduate Student Scholarship. This year we will also add into the mix the belated granting of awards and acknowledgment of milestones. Please note that the deadline for the Professional Development Grant will be extended beyond the date currently posted on the website (https://www.vermontlibraries.org/scholarship-committee) – so please apply if you are interested. Additionally, look for information on
modified schedules for both award nominations and grant applications on our library listservs in the very near future.

We are also still looking for one more committee member for the committee. To round out our collective library experience and representation, we are seeking a librarian who is involved in children’s services. Might this be you? The time commitment is relatively low, but the satisfaction is high. Membership involves reading applications for the various awards and scholarships and meeting on an online platform to discuss, decide, and award money and/or accolades! If interested, please email me at lisa.milchman@norwichlibrary.org.

In this extremely challenging year, I am constantly awed at the resilience, creativity, and thoughtfulness exhibited by my Vermont colleagues. I am grateful to be part of this community, and I give my thanks to all of you who make it the inspiring place that it is. In the midst of your pandemic planning, I hope you will take a moment to thank someone who inspires you or makes your library life better, easier, or more rewarding.

Take good care,

Lisa Milchman
VLA Scholarship & Awards Committee Chair
Assistant Director, Norwich Public Library
lisa.milchman@norwichlibrary.org
802-649-1184

American Library Association
by Jessamyn West

I attended the American Library Association’s first virtual conference between June 17th and June 27th. This was the first ALA Annual with new Executive Director Tracie Hall, who was replacing acting Director Mary Ghikas, who had been filling in after the retirement of Keith Michael Fiels. Hall took over at a really difficult time, with ALA reporting challenging financials even before COVID-era consequences. I am, and have been, a big fan of her work.

Council meetings -- both forums, which are for informal discussion, and meetings, which are where business gets done -- mostly worked out well. The last Council meeting normally happens at 8 a.m. but thanks to the virtual meeting featuring members and councilors in their home states, meetings were in the afternoon in Vermont so that they could be not too early in Hawaii. Meetings took place over Zoom with voting taking place via an online voting tool that worked fairly well. While there were some accessibility challenges -- the director of the California Library for the Blind is on Council and had lots of useful feedback -- we were able to complete our business.

Here are the actions I took.
1. Before Council, I assisted in crafting a resolution with members of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), ALA CD 45 “Resolution on Developing Library Security Policies in keeping with ALA Policy.” This was eventually passed in Council by a wide margin and will result in the creation of a working group to issue some policy recommendations for libraries. You can read the passed document here: http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/ALA CD 45 Resolution on Developing Library Security Policies in keeping with ALA Policy Revised Final4_0.pdf. This was not as strong as some had hoped for, but a decent start.

2. I spoke to a resolution during Council, ALA CD 43 “Resolution on protecting privacy
3. Two big topics for the forums as well as the Council: One was from ALA Committee on Organization regarding dissolving the Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS), Library and Information Technology Association (LITA), Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA) and Association of Specialized, Government, and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASGCLA) divisions. These will be replaced by Core: Leadership, Infrastructure, Futures as a division at a later time. This is a multi-year process and, while sad, was the way these individual groups wanted to go, so voting for it was the thing to do and nearly everyone did. I believe you can read the report here: http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2027.2%20Committee%20on%20Organization.pdf.

4. The last big thing is the ALA Forward Together plan, which is a huge restructuring project. It passed after a lot of discussion and is a beginning to really thinking how to make ALA more welcoming and accessible to more members and maybe less bureaucratic. It involves a lot of bylaw changes and other things, but we were just voting to mostly get the process started. You can read the report here: http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/ALA%20CD%2042%20Forward%20Together.pdf. I expect there will be many more related votes.

On a personal note, I've been using ALA Connect and finding it a complicated kind of messy system and have been talking to the community engagement staff to see if we can make it a better and more useful tool for ALA members. I would encourage VLA members who are also ALA members to interact with it and feel free to give me some feedback, and I can maybe pass it along and help things get improved.

We got a lot of feedback on ALA's financial situation, which is not great. There will be a special Council meeting in September to vote on some financials, and I'll pass along that information. All documents for this virtual meeting can be found on this page (look for VIR in the lefthand column): http://www.ala.org/aboutala/virtual-and-midwinter-2020

I would also like to draw attention to ALA President Julius Jefferson Jr.'s first official act: "ALA takes responsibility for past racism, pledges a more equitable association." It's an exceptionally strong document and makes me optimistic for ALA maybe being able to adapt and change. Full text here: http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/06/ala-takes-responsibility-past-racism-pledges-more-equitable-association.

It is my pleasure to serve as your councilor.

Jessamyn West
Vermont Chapter Councilor to American Library Association
Vermont Mutual Aid Society
jessamyn@gmail.com
@jessamyn

New England Library Association
by Amy Williams

NELA 2020 Virtual Conference

8 half-day virtual events spanning August into November, kicking off Thursday, August 6!

FREE for NELA members; discounted rate for joining NELA at conference registration; $100 for non-members.

So far, keynote speakers include Laurie Halse Anderson, Susan Halpin, Robert Aziz, Alan Inouye, Joel Christian Gill, and Juston McKinney!


Amy Williams, MLS
VLA Representative to NELA
Assistant Director, Rutland Free Library
vt@nelib.org
amy@rutlandfree.org
802-773-1860

Inclusion
by Bridget Stone-Allard

It is a privilege to be asked to chair the VLA Inclusion Roundtable. As the adoptive mom of a young Black man - age 15, I have wrestled with issues of anti-racism for some time. The issues are external: my fears for my son as he stands ready to get his driver's permit at a time when the town I live in is doubling the police budget, the conversation with his English teacher last spring about the experience of reading, discussing, synthesizing the messages in *To Kill A Mockingbird* as the only BIPOC in his class. The issues are internal: Am I doing enough? Am I doing it with right intention and in the right way? To whom do I owe debts of gratitude and how can I live in a way that authentically embodies gratitude, and isn't about me?

Watching John Lewis's final trip over the Edmund Pettus Bridge (https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2020/07/26/john-lewis-procession-edmund-pettus-bridge-vpx-rs.cnn), I am struck by the image of a solitary journey. The simplicity of his caisson pulled by two black horses in the heat and humidity of Alabama summer, the simple black livery of the driver of a great man. Red wheels moving slowly forward. What was the scent of the crushed blood-red rose petals? Was their sweetness stronger as the carriage passed than the sweat and toil of John Lewis’s life, and those who walked with him on this final journey?

The Edmund Pettus bridge is named for the Confederate general and former leader of the Klu Klux Klan. Congressman Lewis’s remains pause at the apex of the Edmund Pettus bridge for a moment of silence. This moment to me seemed too brief as I sit at home, not under that same sweltering sun. His family joins in behind and I wonder at the distance they walk to complete the journey. I see flashing images in my mind’s eye, scenes from the film *Selma*, filmed at this location. For a moment, I see a flashing light swirling behind Congressman Lewis's caisson, and think it is a police escort. It is the hearse.

The echoes of 1965 are undeniable, when we compare current news footage and
commentary to historic film from that time ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smx-Sk3PzzI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smx-Sk3PzzI)).

Please listen to John Lewis’s accepting the National Book award in 2016 for *March: Book Three* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqmYNOPVyO4#action=share](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqmYNOPVyO4#action=share)):

> This is unreal. This is unbelievable. As some of you know, I grew up in rural Alabama, very, very poor, very few books in our home. And I remember in 1956, when I was sixteen years old, some of my brothers and sisters and cousins going down to the public library and trying to get library cards, and we were told that the library was for whites only…. And to come here, and to receive this award, this honor . . . it’s too much. Thank you. . . . But I had a wonderful teacher in elementary school who told me, “Read, my child, read.” And I tried to read everything. I love books.

Lewis speaks to libraries (at least some libraries) complicity as part of a segregated society not that long ago. In what ways can we pay homage to this great man? *How can we assure and promote access for all?*

Many of us are seeing great interest in materials on anti-racism. We have patrons who are surprised that we've had these books on the shelves for years and they've never been checked out. It is a common experience to override circulation stats with conscience when they tell us that tell us these books might be culled. Maybe we struggle, determined to give these important works audience -- we promote them in reader’s advisory, we display them, we share them at story time. We want to do more. *What more can we do?*

As Kevin mentioned in his letter earlier in this newsletter, "The availability of e-resources and connectivity for patron access to those e-resources is wide-ranging." This is salient to inclusion. There is compelling data to support using library budgets for online materials during COVID-19. Through OverDrive Advantage, libraries can see what their local patrons are waiting to read, order those titles, and instantly have high rates of circulation on the items we purchase. Of course, without robust connectivity statewide, libraries and patrons are disadvantaged.

The Vermont Library Association Inclusion Roundtable is looking for ways to connect existing systems statewide to make it easier for patrons and staff to find materials related to marginalized experiences.

Lists of materials are one way to improve access, as they inform our collection development. They are also of benefit to patrons, who are hungry for information. The following exceptional list is curated by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a research arm of the New York Public Library, and an archive repository for information on people of African descent worldwide. [https://www.nypl.org/blog/2020/06/09/schomburg-center-black-liberation-reading-list](https://www.nypl.org/blog/2020/06/09/schomburg-center-black-liberation-reading-list)

Integrated library systems (ILS) may be used more effectively to improve patron access also. Koha Catamount is currently testing a collection code of "Diversity." How might we build bridges with other systems: VOKAL? Clover? What other resources like Aspen Discovery (a ByWater Solutions product: [https://bywatersolutions.com/projects/aspen-discovery](https://bywatersolutions.com/projects/aspen-discovery)) could be paired with Clover, OverDrive, and Kanopy to unify processes and make our catalogs more robust and more accessible to all?

We are beginning this conversation. Will you join us?

With you in the journey,

Bridget Stone-Allard
People of Vermont Libraries

St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont:
Comings and Goings
by Adriene Katz

Librarian Frank Moulton will be retiring on August 7, 2020 (we will miss you!), and librarian Mark Wilhelmi was hired February 22, 2020 (we are so happy to have you!). I, Adriene Katz, am over a year as a librarian for St. Johnsbury Athenaeum (my start date, March 14, 2019, which I like to think about now as “Pie Day,” mmm, pie). Whether it is interlibrary loans, circulation, or archives, I will continue serving the communities in and around St. Johnsbury.

Edit This Newsletter

Interested in newsletter design or editing? VLA’s new membership software comes with newsletter possibilities. If you would like to work on the VLA News, please contact Janet at vermontlibrariesnews@gmail.com.

Visit Us on the Web!
http://www.vermontlibraries.org

Vermont Library Association
PO Box 803, Burlington, VT 05402