

ARKANSAS LIBRARIES

FALL-WINTER 2025

VOLUME 82, NUMBERS 3-4



Arkansas Library Association

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ANNUAL CONFERENCE RECAP

•

ARLA ELECTION RESULTS

•

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Arkansas Library Association, 2025

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Published by the Arkansas Library Association

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Arkansas Libraries is the official journal of the Arkansas Library Association. It contains articles of current interest, historical significance or literary value, concerning all aspects of librarianship, particularly items pertinent to Arkansas. It also includes official statements of and information provided by the Arkansas Library Association.

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This publication is mailed to members of the Association and is available digitally at <https://arlib.org/arkansas-libraries>. To subscribe, please consult the ArLA website for individual or institutional memberships: <https://arlib.org/membership>. Individual issues can be purchased for \$50 per copy by emailing the ArLA treasurer: info@arlib.org.

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Cover Photo: Fayetteville Public Library in the Snow, by Emma Ellis.

Journal design by Ethan C. Nobles, Ethan@NoblesLawFirm.com

FROM THE PRESIDENT Forward into Light

by Adam Webb

ArLA President

“What’s past is prologue.” - William Shakespeare

I’ve come back to that quote over and over again when I worry about the future of our libraries in Arkansas. It seems to exist in liminal space. Does it mean that what happened in the past is a portent of things to come? Does it imply that time repeats itself? Or does it imply that what is to come is not yet written?

The last few years have not been kind to us. There is no denying or sugarcoating that. Like many institutions in our democracy, we believed that this storm would pass, like it always had, and that we would soon be back to business as usual. That thinking, of which I am as guilty as anyone else, allowed the anti-library movement to grow roots and spread. Four years into this, we still don’t know how deep those roots grew. What I do know is that the “past is prologue” line is only part of the quote. It concludes with “what to come, in yours and my discharge.”

Others may have said it better (Henley’s famous “*It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul*” comes to mind), but the fact remains. What happened to libraries in this state happened, and there’s nothing we can do about that. What *will* happen in libraries in this state, or this association, is in large part up to us.

One of my primary focuses during my presidential year is inoculation. We need to do everything in our collective power to ensure that libraries, library workers, and our patrons’ rights are protected in Arkansas. A big part of that strategy will involve fostering stronger collaboration among all libraries and library types in our state. Arkansas is rich with diverse library environments, each serving its own unique population. But the challenges we face, whether it is funding, advocacy, professional development, workforce support, or safeguarding intellectual freedom, don’t care about the lines we’ve drawn on a map. What we need more than anything is a statewide association that is ready and capable to respond to issues facing our membership, whether



Webb

it is a book challenge at a K-5 library in Possum Kingdom, or a complex funding issue at our State Capitol. That’s what I’m hoping to build, but I’ll need all of your help.

One of the first steps will require consolidation. I plan to meet with the leadership of Advocates for All Arkansas Libraries in the early months of 2026 to discuss a merger of our organizations. For that to work, we’ll need to build ArLA’s advocacy and legislative infrastructure. Earlier this year, the ArLA Executive Board approved the creation of a new Legislative Committee. I plan to head that committee in the inaugural year as we draft our work for the committee and set the legislative agenda for the association. With 2026 being a fiscal year for the General Assembly, that gives us time to lay the groundwork for pro-library legislation in the coming years. After that, I hope to meet with the leadership of Arkansas Association for Instructional Media to see how our two organizations can cooperate and coordinate. AAIM is tightly knit, strong, and capable. So is ArLA. I think we’d be stronger together. I know I’m an outlier in that line of thinking, but I think it is worth exploring joining forces as much as possible.

One of the best things we can do to protect our libraries is to keep proving them wrong. We’ve sat by and listened to years of beratement and denigration of our profession by elected officials and former state library board members. In recent months, we have seen a shift in the rhetoric -- increased attention on the services libraries provide and the good that we do. Clay Goff’s comments in the first two Arkansas State Library board meetings since its reconstitution have been a breath of fresh air. Some of the other comments are worth trying to inoculate ourselves against. This shift has underscored the critical importance of ensuring that policymakers and community members understand the role of libraries as defenders of free inquiry and democratic access to information. It also underscores the importance of constant vigilance. I am proud of the thoughtful, respectful, and evidence-based advocacy efforts many of you have undertaken in your communities and beyond. ArLA remains committed to supporting you with tools, training, and a unified platform that amplifies our shared values. We will continue working closely with partner organizations to champion legislation that supports library workers and protects the freedom to read.

Of course, much of our work together culminates each year in our annual conference. Planning is well underway, and I am excited about the robust program our committees are building. We aim to create an

event that not only provides high-quality learning experiences but also celebrates the incredible work happening in libraries across the state. I hope to see many of you there to share ideas, reconnect with colleagues, and be inspired by the passion that defines our professional community.

As we look to the months ahead, I want to acknowledge the extraordinary resilience you continue to show in the face of rapid change. Every reference question you answer, every student you support, every program you plan, and every collection decision you make contributes to the well-being of Arkansans. Even when the work feels invisible, it is never insignificant. Thank you for your

dedication, your professionalism, and the generosity with which you support one another. It is a privilege to lead this association, and I look forward to continuing our work together.

Adam Webb is the Executive Director of the Garland County Library in Hot Springs, Arkansas. He serves on the Public Library Association's Advocacy Committee and is a liaison for the American Library Association's Committee on Legislation. Webb is the 2025-2026 ArLA president.

FROM THE EDITOR Actual Intelligence

by *Britt Anne Murphy*

Library Director, Hendrix College

There has perhaps been as much hype around artificial intelligence in libraries as there has been about those dangerous books for youth, at least in our fair state. The hype has been both exciting and hysterical in nature. On the hysterical side, there have been visions of smarter-than-us computer robots taking over our world and upsetting human civilization as we know it. On the exciting side, there are visions of robots doing things humans are bad at: driving cars, doing monotonous jobs, and yes, writing editorials! I did not, and will not, write editorials with the help of AI, but I have used AI to help suggest better words and constructions for other pieces of writing, help develop course proposals, and help me do more complicated searches.

You notice that I repeated the word, "help." I think the key to using AI is to understand that it is a tool, and not a stand-alone. It should not substitute for actual intelligence. We are still smarter than computers because of our critical thinking abilities and sentience – our souls. When talking to a group of sophomores about why and when they should use the Hendrix Writing Center, I spoke to the reticence students have in consulting experts, whether that be a peer writing assistant or a librarian. Writing exposes our inmost skills, thoughts, and abilities, making us extremely vulnerable. College students



Murphy

are still developing these skills; we never expect them to come to us knowing everything – isn't that what they're in college for? And yet students live in terror of judgment. Some students use AI to shirk the thinking process, called "cognitive offloading" by scholars. The trouble is that students are still learning to research and write, and figuring out what is bad, good, and excellent takes about the length of a bachelor's degree, and lots of critical feedback from someone with a brain.

This issue of *Arkansas Libraries* demonstrates what actual intelligence of librarians around the state can produce. We learn about difficulties faced when managers are confronted with "loyal opposition" and how we can use examples from around the state to build community. Noah Elrod gives a historical account of past librarians who were formational and formidable, but not always on the right side of history. Lavioris Martin speaks more to this issue from the perspective of Black librarians, while our government documents columnist talks about an essential service provided by today's Arkansas State Library: free content for the blind and print disabled. Other articles recount how to address complicated problems, whether it's genrefying or succession issues. Shawna Thorup takes AI head on, emphasizing that AI tools are predictive engines and not thinkers. When I take a step back to take in the collective intelligence represented in this issue, it confirms my conviction that librarians are more essential than ever – capable of improving the lives of our citizens with our brain power. Take a minute to digest ArLA President Adam Webb's missive, which is a call to action. He speaks to our collective intelligence, communication skills, and passion for our communities. He asks us to collaborate with one another, to swallow our pride over any territorial boundaries and go all in – together.

Turning the Page: ArLA 2025 Annual Conference

by Janice Weddle

ArLA Interim President-Elect and
Conference Co-Chair

Librarians gathered from all over Arkansas on the weekend of October 17-19, 2025, to attend the annual conference at the Hot Springs Convention Center. In the midst of another tumultuous year for libraries and library workers across the country, it was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect, bond, and share our successes and failures with our Arkansas library community. The year also proved to be tumultuous for ArLA leadership, which in turn impacted the planning and execution of this year's conference. Adam Webb began planning for the 2025 conference as president-elect and chair of the Conference Committee early in the year. The conference would not have been a success without the hard work and support of the entire conference committee that Adam gathered together: Misty Hawkins, Oliver Jennings, Crystal Gates, Jenn Wann, Lacy Wolfe, Robin Campbell, James Nowlin, Ron Russ, Amber Wilson, Jessica Riedmueller, and Britt Murphy. When Adam assumed the ArLA presidency in July, and I became the interim president-elect and joined the conference committee as a co-chair with him, it was a smooth transition for me thanks to all the hard work, dedication, and planning from each of these individuals. I can only say thank you to each of them and to every other ArLA officer and all the member volunteers who contributed in ways big and small to this year's conference.

By the numbers, this year's conference included:

- 227 Arkansas library attendees
- 72 baskets in the silent auction
- 56 attending new members' reception
- 40 breakout sessions
- 23 vendors to visit in the vendor hall
- 12 awards

- 10 poster sessions
- 8 trivia teams
- 4 performers' showcase presentations
- 3 keynote general sessions
- 3 preconference events
- 1 bookmobile rodeo (cut short by weather!)
- 1 annual business meeting
- 1 executive board meeting
- 1 member social hour reception

Turning the Page: Overview

More than the numbers, this was a weekend for Arkansas library workers to find joy in their profession and feel supported as we turn the page to new opportunities and challenges that will help us grow and develop for what lies ahead. Presenters shared their wisdom and insights with colleagues throughout the conference in the breakout sessions and poster sessions, with lessons learned and pages turned at academic, public, and school libraries throughout the state. Though there's not room to highlight every program from the weekend, I hope the descriptions below will give you a sense of the engaging keynote programs and events offered at conference this year.

Featured Keynote Speakers

Opening Session: *Meet Me at the Library* with Shamichael Hallman

Shamichael Hallman was our keynote speaker for the opening general session this year. Hallman is author of *Meet Me at the Library: A Place to Foster Social Connection and Promote Democracy* and currently serves as director of Civic Health and Economic Opportunity with the Urban Libraries Council (ULC). In this role he is working to create ULC's upcoming focus on libraries as essential city and county infrastructure including their value as physical spaces, as a connector of diverse lived experiences, and libraries' roles in public safety and public health.





Featured Speaker

Stephen Koch

Co-creator of award-winning radio program, *Arkansongs*



Hallman's keynote focused on this work and kicked off conference on an uplifting note. The keynote was followed by a book signing, with copies of Hallman's book available for purchase from Black Ribbon Books in Hot Springs.

Author Lunch with Stephen Koch, host of *Arkansongs* and author of *From Almeda to Zilphia: Arkansas Women Who Transformed American Popular Song*

This year's Author Luncheon featured Stephen Koch, host of the syndicated public radio program *Arkansongs*, the leading scholar on 1940s R&B pioneer Louis Jordan, and author of *From Almeda To Zilphia: Arkansas Women Who Transformed American Popular Song*. With guitar in hand, Koch serenaded us with songs and shared stories of the Midsouth's music culture and its luminaries. It was wonderful to hear a full program from one of this year's Arkansiana Award winners.



Candace Owens and Stephen Koch.

Closing Session: Panel Discussion with Lauren Comito, Urban Libraries Unite and Alison Macrina, Library Freedom Project

This year's conference ended with a great panel discussion on the future of libraries with Lauren Comito of Urban Libraries Unite and Alison Macrina of the Library Freedom Project, moderated by Adam Webb.

Pre-Conference Events

For those who came into town early, there were fantastic opportunities to learn and build connections during pre-conference events.

The Arkansas State Library held a pre-conference workshop for public library directors at the Garland County Library on October 17 from 10 am – 4 pm.

The College and University Librarians of Arkansas (CULAR) community of interest hosted an AI summit and unconference at the Arkansas School



New Members' Social Hour winner Ollie Carter.

for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts (ASMSA) in downtown Hot Springs on October 17 from 11 am-4 pm. The program began with guest speaker Jason Coleman, Academic Services Librarian from Kansas State University Libraries, who presented ACRL's recently adopted document of AI Competencies for Library Workers.

This year's conference also coincided with the 34th annual Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. The film festival featured a screening on Friday night of Oscar-nominated and Peabody Award-winning Director Kim A. Snyder's latest documentary, *The Librarians*. Special discounted tickets were available for ArLA attendees to view the screening and the panel discussion with two of the documentary film's stars and moderated by our own Adam Webb. A special bonus for attendees was the film short from StoryCorps, *The Treasures of Mrs. Grady's Library*, which features Judge Olly Neal speaking with his daughter, Karama, about how stealing a book from his high school library, and the reaction from the librarians, turned his life around. Little did film viewers know that Judge Neal and his daughter were in the audience! They received a long and appreciative standing ovation from the audience.

ArLA Business

The ArLA Executive Board met early Saturday morning to start off the conference and take care of any business items. The annual member business meeting was held on Sunday afternoon where annual reports were delivered to the general membership by each Executive Board officer, committee chair, and CI representative. The results of ArLA's 2025 elections were announced and officially recognized by those present. An article in this issue of *Arkansas Libraries* will detail the results of the election.

This year's conference included a change in the way that conference meals were ordered for registered attendees. In an effort to increase financial responsibility to our association's funds and to



Imagination Library.

reduce food waste, attendees were polled about their attendance at each conference meal and tickets were issued for those stating they meant to attend the meal. While some lessons were learned and a couple of small changes will need to be made next year in order to make it a smoother process for all involved, I am very proud of the fact that the tickets worked as intended this year to reduce both the amount of wasted food and wasteful spending of association funds. The lessons learned by this year's conference committee will be shared with those planning next year's conference as they work with a newly contracted catering company at our conference location.

Awards & Scholarship Dinner

The Awards Dinner was held on Saturday night in the Hot Springs Convention Center. The tables were beautifully decorated with book art pieces crafted by the North Little Rock Public Library, which were then donated to the silent auction. The plated meal featured a chicken and alfredo pasta entree, salad, and choice of two desserts. Librarians proudly gathered to celebrate years of dedicated work, newly launched careers, academic achievements, children's librarians, scholarships, and a range of prestigious awards. An article in this issue of *Arkansas Libraries* will feature our awardees and scholarship recipient.



Panel session -- How Does Your Garden Grow?

Putting the Fun in Fundraising and Socializing

The Membership Committee held a fun gathering in the Embassy Suites common area on Saturday before the Awards Dinner. This year, several of ArLA's CIs had tables and a representative available to speak with new(ish) ArLA members interested in becoming more involved in their respective communities of interest. Games and prizes were awarded at the reception, which numbered over 50 members, and the hotel's happy hour enhanced the interaction.

Later that night following the Awards Dinner, the annual Trivia event kicked off in the Embassy Suites' Bistro. Amber Wilson and Jessica Riedmueller from UCA once again conducted the competition, and there was fierce fighting between library teams for prizes and bragging rights, as well as a lot of great music (thanks to our emcees!). Fifty-five people on eight teams tested their knowledge and paid extra for clues, all with the goal of victory and contributing to a worthy cause. In the end the Arkanbrains Team (yes, Arkansongs host and Arkansiana winner Stephen Koch and his publisher, Erin Wood, were both on the team) claimed victory over the ruling team from Faulkner County Library by just a few points! Trivia night raised \$883.00 for LEAF (Library Education & Aid Fund). As a member of this year's winning team, I challenge everyone to join us for next year's event!

The Basket Auction this year included 72 baskets (the highest number ever, thanks to North Little Rock's library donation of 30 centerpieces!) and raised a total of \$1,785.00 for the Library Education & Aid Fund (LEAF), which is also a record. The

baskets included a variety of items, such as games, gifts, spa products, holiday-themed items, books, kitchen tools, adult beverages, and the beautifully crafted book art centerpiece arrangements used at the Awards Dinner. The competition on some of the bidding sheets became quite intense! Though, it was all in a spirit of fun and generosity for a good cause.

ArLA conference t-shirts and additional merchandise are available for purchase through ArLA's Bonfire online store. Attendees were able to order items ahead of the conference, but they still remain available for those wishing to purchase them now. A link to the Bonfire store with the full range of items available can be found on the ArLA website.

Beyond these fun fundraising events, there is a donation button on the ArLA website to make financial contributions to the Scholarship or LEAF funds at any time. Thank you for your support and generosity to those in our Arkansas library community.

See You Next Year!

Next year's conference will be held again at the Hot Springs Convention Center, with hotel accommodations available at the Hilton Embassy Suites. The main conference will feature full days of sessions on Friday, October 16, Saturday, October 17, and Sunday, October 18, 2026. Look for more information to come in 2026!

Janice Weddle is library faculty at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Arkansas and is currently serving as 2025 interim president-elect and conference co-chair for the Arkansas Library Association.



Winning Trivia Team Arkanbrains.

ArLA Election Results

by Taylor Vanlandingham

Chair of the Nominating and Elections Committee/ArLA Past President

The Arkansas Library Association held elections to choose who will serve on the Executive Board of the Association in 2026. Open positions this year were president-elect (3-year term), SELA representative (2-year term), ALA councilor (3-yr term), and four members-at-large (1-year term). The election was held online and results were announced in the Association business meeting at the Annual Conference in Hot Springs.

Note that we held a special election for president-elect due to Adam Webb, 2025 president-elect, stepping up to fill the vacancy of ArLA president mid-year. Janice Weddle, faculty librarian for instruction and reference at the University of Central Arkansas, was elected to finish out Adam's term as president-elect. We also had a special election for ArLA secretary, for which Misty Hawkins was elected to finish out the two-year term in 2026. Many thanks to Janice and Misty for serving the Association!

Below are the bios of those newly elected to serve on the ArLA Executive Board for 2026.

President-Elect (3-year term including president and past president): Lacy Wolfe

Lacy Wolfe currently serves as Chief Operating Officer at the North Little Rock Public Library System. She earned her MLS from Indiana University in 2011 and spent ten years in academic libraries at Ouachita Baptist University and Henderson State University before returning to public libraries, where her library journey began. She has served ArLA as ALA Chapter Councilor for two terms and currently co-chairs both the Membership Committee and Public Libraries Communities of Interest.

Lacy is passionate about connecting people to library services and supporting staff at every level. As President-Elect, she wants to strengthen member engagement, support leadership development across all types of libraries, and ensure ArLA remains a strong advocate for our profession. Outside of work, you'll usually find Lacy reading, knitting, hiking, or



Wolfe

training for her next 5K.

SELA Representative (2-year term): LaShonda Campbell



Campbell

LaShonda Campbell serves as the Collections Development Librarian at UA – Monticello. As a passionate advocate for the UAM Taylor Library, she has strengthened the library's resources and services to make it more welcoming for students and faculty.

LaShonda earned a BA in Psychology from Tougaloo

College, an MLIS from the University of Denver, and a Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College Law School. She also serves as an adjunct professor for the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at UAM.

LaShonda is actively engaged in ArLA, where she serves as a member of the Awards Committee and Conference Program Subcommittee. She is also the co-chair of SELA's New Members' Roundtable. LaShonda was selected as a 2025 American Library Association (ALA) Emerging Leader (EL) and Core: Leadership, Infrastructure, Futures Division EL Cohort. LaShonda's cohort had the distinct honor of participating in a poster session and presenting their project, *Financial Impact of Key Volunteer Roles in Core: Developing Financial Assistance Programs to Support Volunteerism*, to Core's Board of Directors at the 2025 ALA Annual Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

LaShonda enjoys traveling with her husband, co-managing the family barbecue business, and spending time with her four daughters and grandkids.

ALA Counselor (3-year term through summer 2028): Crystal Gates

Crystal R. Gates, CEO/Chief Librarian of the North Little Rock Public Library System, is a past president of ArLA and served in 2025 as ArLA's ALA Councilor and Awards Chair. A dedicated library leader, she actively champions statewide advocacy and legislative engagement in addition to embracing the honor and responsibility of



Gates

mentoring others. Her professional service includes committee work in ALA and PLA, serving as past president of the Southeastern Library Association, and filling in wherever needed for ArLA.

Crystal holds an MLIS from LSU and a master's degree in history from Louisiana Tech. She believes libraries are more than books – they are catalysts for creative learning, community connection, and economic development. When taking time away from library work, you may find her resting in nature, reading, or creating new recipes in her kitchen.

Member-at-Large (1-year term):

Ashley Cooksey

Ashley J. Cooksey (she/her) is an assistant professor and the program director for the Instructional Technology - Library Media Specialist Master's program at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Arkansas. Ashley began her teaching career as a third grade classroom literacy teacher in a small, rural school.



Cooksey

After obtaining her Master's of Education in Instructional Technology - Library Media Specialist K-12, she served as a school librarian for grades 5-8 before moving to a new district to serve as a K-6 elementary school librarian.

Ashley is a past president and current secretary of the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media (AAIM) and a member of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the Arkansas Library Association (ArLA), and the American Library Association and American Association for School Librarians (ALA/AASL). Ashley was the 2018 recipient of the AASL Social Media Superstar Award as an Advocacy Ambassador and is currently serving on the AASL National School Library Standards review committee. In any spare time that remains, Ashley is also a 200-hour registered yoga teacher.

Member-at-Large (1-year term):

Cassandra Barnett

Cassandra Barnett has been a school librarian in both elementary and secondary school libraries for more years than she wants to count. She has presented at state and national conferences on a variety of topics concerning school libraries. An active member of the American Association of School Librarians, she has served on committees

both in ALA and AASL, been a member of the AASL Board of Directors, and is a past president of AASL. She is currently the Program Advisor for School Libraries at the Arkansas Department of Education's division of Elementary and Secondary Education.



Barnett

Member-at-Large (1-year term): Shawna Thorup

Shawna Thorup has enjoyed ArLA membership for several years as both a public and an academic librarian. She has assisted in planning more than one ArLA conference, served on the awards and nominating committees, and actively participated in what is currently known as RISci, the Reference and Instructional Services Community of Interest. Currently, she edits the Two-Year Colleges column in *Arkansas Libraries*. Her areas of interest



Thorup

include academic and intellectual freedom, staff/professional development, assessment, information literacy, customer service, and generative AI. Shawna earned a BA in English from the University of California, Berkeley, and an MLIS from UCLA. Since 2016, she has helped Northwest Arkansas Community College students

succeed by serving in a number of roles, including adjunct faculty of English. She was recently named NWACC's library director. With her strong background in reference services and having worked her way up in libraries by starting as a shelver, Shawna will advocate for and represent all types of libraries and library workers as a member-at-large.

Member-at-Large (1-year term):

Kay Strahan

Kay Strahan, MSLIS, AHIP is a dedicated health sciences librarian focused on integrating information literacy and evidence-based practice into curricular instruction. Currently serving as assistant professor and Northwest Campus librarian at the University of Arkansas for Medical



Strahan

Sciences (UAMS), Kay oversees all library services on the Northwest Campus, collaborating closely with faculty to integrate librarians into curriculum and provide tailored educational support. As a member of professional organizations like the Medical Library Association (MLA), she remains dedicated to fostering continuous learning and skill development among her peers. Passionate about empowering students and researchers, Kay hopes to shape the landscape of librarianship in Arkansas through her involvement in volunteer library organizations.

Special Election Effective January-December 2026

Secretary: Misty Hawkins

Misty Hawkins is the regional director of the Arkansas River Valley Regional Library System. She holds a degree in library science from the

University of Oklahoma and leads initiatives that strengthen collaboration and access for rural and small libraries. Misty lives on a cattle farm with her husband, Nolan. Outside of work, she enjoys time with her family, true crime documentaries, and relaxing with coloring books.



Hawkins

Taylor Vanlandingham is library director at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas and currently is serving as past president for the Arkansas Library Association.

WHAT'S UP? DOCS.

Library for the Blind and Print Disabled
by Dominique Hallett, Arkansas State University

with Special Guest Natalie Marlin

Recently, I attended a webinar about “Accessible Content from the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS),” a service provided by the Library of Congress, and it sparked a renewed interest in finding out more. (<https://fdlp.gov/training/accessible-content-national-library-service-blind-and-print-disabled>)



Hallett

Since the federal government was closed for business at the time, I reached out to our local source – Natalie Marlin, library supervisor/expert at the ASL’s Library for the Blind and Print Disabled – on Monday, October 20, 2025, for an interview. The vast majority of this column is credited to her knowledge and insight!

We started with the question “What do you want everybody to know about the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled? Both in general and specific to Arkansas?”

Her response (paraphrased a bit): I think that the main thing I want to let folks know is that this is open to all Arkansans of all ages who are blind, have low vision, or even have reading disabilities. Also, a lot of folks don't know what print disability

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means. What that can mean is whether they have a physical disability that makes it hard for them to hold on to a book or turn pages. This can be anything from Parkinson's to muscular issues, maybe a stroke, or something of that nature, or even arthritis in the hand can make it hard to turn pages in that way.



Marlin

Another thing that people might not realize is that we are available for temporary issues that make it hard for them to read the standard print. So sometimes we have folks who have cataracts, so they have low vision due to cataracts. They utilize our services, and then maybe they get surgery for those cataracts in their vision and improve, and then they're good to go. Then they can cancel the services since they have improved. It is a matter of self-reporting. The same is true of print disabled – it also can be temporary. Maybe they're doing some rehab. It makes it hard, but they're working toward improving and they get back to a place where they want to cancel our services, and that's fine. We're happy to help them for as long as we could. So that's something that we like to let everyone know.

We also want everyone to know that it's free, and that there are no fines or fees. We send everything through the mail – free postage, free matter for the

blind. And we provide boxes and things for them to return these items to us. For example, if somebody wants to use the player, we send them both the player and the books they request on cartridges. We will send them to their home address, or if they want to use the downloadable option using the phone app or on the desktop, they can access it that way. Or they can download and have a player sent out.

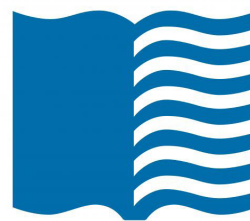
I like to make sure people know is that it is free, and that we can mail things to you. A lot of times people are familiar with how their public library works, where there may be limits on how much can be checked out at a time. It is a bit different with us. When it comes to BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download), the free software from NLS that allows patrons to download books and magazines, the download limit is 250, so that's a pretty good limit. Cartridges are limited by physical space, but can hold multiple books at a time, so once again, you have options to fit your reading mood. Also, if a thousand people want to download the same James Patterson book at the same time, they can.

We have a pretty good collection of almost 200,000 audiobooks. We also have the braille items, braille books and magazines as well as braille e-readers, that people can use. People check those out just like the audio players. They get checked out and sent from our Utah distribution center. They are on long-term loan, just like the audio players.

We like to let folks know about Regional Talking Book Libraries around the country. The Arkansas State Library functions as a Regional, but if you move out of state, we can help you find another Regional Library. We just transfer your service and send the application over to them, and you continue to get the resources that you need.

When asked about the quality of the audiobooks (I remember the days of the old 4-track cassette tapes my friend got from the Blind and Handicapped Library in Jonesboro – long before it shut down and the name changed nationally), the response was quite interesting.

In some cases, the NLS is able to acquire commercial audiobooks like the ones you can find on Audible. But in other cases, it may be a copy of the automated versions from a while back. It depends on the book. Interestingly, when it is a commercial version, it still requires processing, usually to add the markup, specifically for our patrons that allow for greater navigation purposes. So they might actually get the one that has been created for Audible, with the difference being that there are a few more markups and a few more places where people can



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

jump around.

As an academic librarian, I asked the following: Some books are not currently available through BARD. Is there a way to request that something gets turned into an audiobook?

There is a way to put in a request. You could communicate this request to your Regional Library, for example, any of my staff could put in the request on your behalf. There are no guarantees, as there are budget constraints, and areas that the NLS is trying to build up currently, but is it worth asking. We actually had one request for a Judy Jones book. Because we've seen that quite a few other of her works were in the collection, we put in the request. The biggest issue can be whether or not that happens this year versus next year, but it is always worth checking.

One thing we've not yet discussed is the fact that library personnel can sign the forms to get a patron signed up for services. Those eligible to sign the forms are listed on the form itself. I learned from the webinar I attended that while I could not sign up a family member or myself, I could sign up others who meet the qualifications.

Huge thanks to Natalie Marlin for her valuable insight and to the State Library for being our Regional Talking Book Library!

Relevant Websites

- <https://library.arkansas.gov/services/lbpd/> - The website for the Arkansas Library for the Blind and Print Disabled.
- <https://www.loc.gov/nls/> - National Library Service website.
- <https://www.loc.gov/nls/new-materials/collections-connections/> - This section of the NLS library is for the e-newsletter that highlights books and resources from the collection.

Dominique Hallett is the government information and STEM librarian at the Dean B. Ellis Library at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

It Doesn't Read, It Doesn't Write, It Doesn't Think: A Librarian's Case for the Human

by *Shawna Thorup*, Northwest Arkansas Community College

This article is adapted from remarks originally delivered as a lightning talk at the AI in Arkansas Libraries Unconference, held on October 10, 2025, in Hot Springs. The content has been edited for clarity and publication.



Thorup

The Hollow Confidence of the Machine

I need to confess something: I asked ChatGPT to write this. It was...fine. Grammatically perfect, absolutely confident, and completely hollow. I know, because I'm an avid reader, a librarian, and, on the side, an adjunct English faculty member. I spend my life immersed in the messy, glorious act of human communication.

And the AI? It didn't know what it was saying. Because it can't. And that's the point we need to be clear about right now: AI doesn't read. It doesn't write. It doesn't think. It doesn't feel. It just predicts. And we need to stop talking about these tools like they're some kind of magical, sentient being. They aren't. They're just math.

Prediction Engines, Not Thinkers

As John Warner reminds us in his essential book, *How to Think About Writing in the Age of AI*, large language models aren't intelligent. They're prediction engines. They're sophisticated probability machines, guessing which word is statistically most likely to come next. That's not thought. That's an advanced spreadsheet. That's a parlor trick masquerading as genius.

When we confuse that output with genuine understanding, we risk surrendering the most valuable, most human parts of our work – our judgment, our empathy, our curiosity, and our meaning-making – to systems that don't possess a single one of those qualities.

Warner argues: "What ChatGPT and other large language models are doing is not writing and shouldn't be considered as such. Writing is thinking. Writing is feeling. Reading and writing are inextricable, and outsourcing our reading to AI is essentially a choice to give up on being human."

I've taken up Warner's *cri de guerre*, "Resist!

Renew! Explore!" and made it my own. What he says about writing, I'd say about librarianship: remove the thinking, the feeling, and the human EXPERIENCE, and what's left isn't learning: it's just generic output.

The Taste of Tang

We're watching this confusion play out every day across our campus. Students ask ChatGPT for "sources" and get flawlessly formatted, completely fabricated citations. Faculty try AI grading and get generic, encouraging yet empty feedback. We see the confidence of the machine, the appearance of rigor, but we know it's a mirage.

As librarians, we know better because we know context is everything. Warner uses a fantastic metaphor for AI-generated text: it's like Tang. Do you remember Tang? It's an orange powder, originally developed for space travel, specifically the 1962 Mercury mission. You mix it with water. It looks like orange juice, but if you've ever had a sip, you know it absolutely is not.

If we start treating AI-generated output, that sweet, artificial Tang, like it's the real thing, we forget what real writing, real research, and real thinking taste like. Our role is to protect and promote the freshly squeezed juice of human knowledge.

Our Invaluable, Inimitable Human Work

This isn't a crisis for us. It's an opportunity to lean into what AI cannot, and will never, do. It clarifies our value proposition.

- **We Read for Meaning:** AI recognizes statistical patterns in words, not ideas. We, the librarians, interpret, connect, and make sense of meaning, the **why** and the **so what**.
- **We Teach Discernment:** AI generates confidence, not credibility. It lies with a smile. We teach students the friction of scholarship, what makes information trustworthy, and how to spot a convincing fake (although that's getting harder every day). We are credibility architects.
- **We Foster Connection:** AI can mimic empathy, but it can't feel it. It doesn't know what it's like to be overwhelmed. We listen, guide, and build trust, making learning **relational**, not transactional. We are the **human infrastructure** of our campuses and our communities.

Augmentation, Not Automation

Now, AI *can* help. I use it. It's a marvelous tool. It can summarize, brainstorm, clean up metadata, or get me past a blank page. But it can't be me, standing in front of you now, seeing you, laughing with you, thinking with you. It can't grasp the significance of the question you're *really* asking.

Warner argues that AI can't kill anything worth

preserving. Our job, the librarian's job, is to stay firmly in the loop, to keep the thinking human, to keep the interactions human, to keep the humans... well, human! Writing, and I'd add librarianship, is a form of thinking, an expression of feeling. AI can imitate the form, but it can't perform the function. The future isn't inevitably robotic; it's a choice, and our hands are on the wheel.

A Case for Hope

AI isn't the end of libraries or librarians. It's a magnificent, glaring reminder of what we're really

for. We don't just manage information: we make meaning from it. We don't just organize knowledge: we cultivate understanding. AI can predict what words belong together. Only we can decide which ones matter.

That's not magic. That's human intelligence and human emotion, and they're worth fighting for.

Shawna Thorup is library director at NorthWest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville, Arkansas.

Reclassified: How Genrefying the Library Brought Students Back to Reading

by *Morgan Hale*

Mayflower Middle School

If you've ever rearranged your living room furniture and immediately questioned every life decision since 2009, you'll understand my year of genrefying the library. I started with a bold, Pinterest-worthy vision – color-coded labels, kids discovering books with near-spiritual joy, and me, sipping lukewarm coffee like the benevolent guardian of literacy I was born to be. Then reality barreled in like an unshelved copy of *Dog Man*.

Genrefying sounds simple – sort the books by genre and voilà, instant harmony – but it's really the literary equivalent of reorganizing a supermarket while shoppers are still inside. Books multiply. Categories argue. Three kids need Chromebook help.



Someone insists *Percy Jackson* belongs in Adventure even though you've sworn it's Fantasy. And yet, despite the chaos, it works: students find books faster, explore more, and wander the shelves with curiosity instead of fear, while you get to witness real change in how kids interact with reading. This past year taught me more than any PD session or librarian TikTok ever could, so here's the journey – what worked, what didn't, and the lessons I'd share with anyone brave enough to take it on.

Part 1: Why I Decided to Genrefy

My origin story begins in grad school, where I first learned about genrefied libraries and immediately thought, "Sign me up." Research showed that genre organization boosts circulation and helps kids find books independently, so I teamed up with my mentor to try it out, sorting, labeling, and wrangling shelves with the help of enthusiastic students.

A year later, I arrived at a new district with a dated collection and a bigger problem: students didn't enjoy library time and rarely checked out books. I started by building relationships and running creative lessons, but students still struggled to find what they wanted. That's when I pitched genrefying, explaining how it could make browsing easier and reading more accessible. The students loved the idea, making my decision easy: it was time for a full collection makeover.

Part 2: Planning-Where Optimism Goes to Thrive (and Then Panic)

Even though I'd helped with genrefication before, optimism alone wouldn't be enough. I researched library systems, collected advice from experienced librarians, and debated genre categories – yes, even magical realism (it ultimately joined Fantasy; no regrets). I settled on a practical list:

Fantasy, Adventure, Humor, Mystery, Realistic Fiction, Scary, Science Fiction, Sports, Romance, Historical Fiction, Classics, Series, Manga, Graphic Novels, Picture Books, and Animals – essentially any category with at least a shelf or two of titles. Mapping the room involved countless sketches and redraws until I landed on a semi-alphabetical layout, keeping some sections anchored near nonfiction to avoid chaos.

Labeling proved the slowest part. I didn't want to waste labels on books needing weeding, multi-genre titles slowed progress, and updating the catalog added complexity. After six months and only halfway through, I shifted strategies: aides added sticky notes with suggested genres, and I followed behind to select the best fit and add labels. I held off on updating the catalog to prevent confusion. This hybrid approach worked beautifully – students began recognizing genre labels while still navigating a layout that felt familiar.

Planning Tips:

- Start with actual reading habits and data
- Keep genre lists simple
- Plan for growth

Part 3: The Process: Where Chaos Lives, Laughs, and Rearranges Shelves

By the end, I had touched every single fiction book in the library. Along the way, I discovered a small army of abandoned titles that hadn't been checked out since flip phones were fashionable. I didn't toss them immediately; instead, I created a "Last Chance" shelf so students could rescue them. Anything left unchosen after a couple of months was



donated. In a weird way, this shelf became its own little "genre purgatory," temporarily holding books that were on the fence for removal.

Next came the physical move, tackled one genre at a time to prevent a book avalanche. My aides pulled Adventure books first, arranged them on their future shelves, and helped shift existing books down, while some predictable authors sped the process along. We completed three genres in the first week.

Then came the dreaded reclassification, but discovering the bulk reclassify feature (scan, swap a suffix, boom!) allowed hundreds of books to update at once and truly saved my sanity. Throughout the process, I kept students informed, and their excitement became the fuel that kept me going.

Process Tips:

- Work in waves
- Enlist student helpers
- Celebrate progress

Part 4: The Immediate Wins

The payoff was almost instant. Circulation skyrocketed: over 33% higher in checkouts, renewals, and holds. Students found books without needing GPS coordinates. They recommended genres to each other like tiny, enthusiastic booksellers. Books were shelved correctly because students finally understood the sections. My aides celebrated how easy shelving had become. The whole library felt different – lighter, more intuitive, more alive.

Part 5: Challenges are Stepping Stones

Yes, books turned up without labels. Yes, students kept checking things out mid-move. To survive, I had aides set aside "mystery items" behind



the desk. I'd add labels, reclassify them, and send them back out. And yes, people will disagree with your genre choices. I welcome it. Students often have insight I don't, and I'm always willing to research and adjust. I haven't read every book in the library, so student input is a gift, not a problem.

Challenge Tips:

- Communicate with students
- Keep flexible space
- Don't fear re-labeling
- Bulk reclassification is your best friend

Part 6: Practical Advice If You're Considering Genrefication

If there's one universal truth about genrefying, it's this: your first draft of the process will *never* be your final draft. Expect to refine things until they actually work for you and your library. And just so we're clear, dear reader – I was learning to be an LMS for the first time *while* doing all this. Lessons were learned, tears were shed, and yes, a few books suffered minor casualties.

Practical Advice Tips:

- Start with data, not vibes – though vibes absolutely have a place.
- Contact librarians who've survived the process.

- Invest in signage; it prevents 97% of "Where's Fantasy?" questions.
- Weed ruthlessly.
- Budget more time than you think, and then add 40%.
- Celebrate small wins, preferably with a snack or a well-deserved Sonic drink.

Final Reflection: Was It Worth It? Absolutely.

Looking back at the planning, the shifting, the labeling, the chaos, and the victories, I can say confidently that this change was worth every minute. Students find books faster, discover new favorites, recommend genres, and actually enjoy browsing. Circulation trends prove the impact. My aides are happier, the layout is intuitive, and the library feels inviting.

Most importantly, books are getting into the hands of kids who genuinely want to read them. Yes, the change was worth it! And based on early results, this is just the beginning.

Morgan Hale is the librarian at Mayflower Middle School in Mayflower, Arkansas.

ArLA 2025 Awards

by Robin Campbell

ArLA Marketing Committee Chair

Each year the Arkansas Library Association honors librarians by recognizing outstanding achievements in the library field. The 2025 Arkansas Library Association Awards and Scholarship Dinner and Ceremony was held October 18, during the 103rd ArLA Annual Conference at the Hot Springs Convention Center October 17-19. Special thanks to Awards Committee Chair Crystal Gates and her committee, who encouraged our members to nominate deserving librarians and library supporters to be recognized for their achievements, dedication, and leadership they bring to Arkansas libraries every day.

Ann Lightsey Children's Librarian Award

Mary Spears Polk received the Ann Lightsey Children's Librarian Award. Given yearly in memory of Ann Lightsey, a children's librarian who dedicated her life to children and reading, the award honors an Arkansas public or school children's librarian of at least five years' experience who has contributed to the improvement of children's programs in their libraries and across the state through professional development conferences. "Mary is a tireless and

enthusiastic advocate for early childhood literacy and is constantly looking to improve our efforts to turn out more readers," said John McGraw, director of the Faulkner County Library, who presented the award. "Frequently, the only real limiter to her programs' attendance is the size of our parking lot. She works with our branch programmers to strengthen offerings across our locations so that all of our young patrons have a rich and rewarding introduction to public libraries."



John McGraw and Mary Spears Polk. Photo by Bec Caughron.

Arkansas Intellectual Freedom Award

Rebecka Virden, awarded the Arkansas Intellectual Freedom Award, was recognized for notable contributions furthering the cause of intellectual freedom in Arkansas. Rebecka has been a steadfast advocate for the free exchange of ideas and the right of every library patron to access a diverse range of information, according to Lacy Wolfe, chief operating officer with the North Little Rock Public Library System, who presented the award. “Rebecka has actively defended the right to read by responding to and opposing attempts at censorship in her community,” Wolfe said. “[She] led transparent and respectful conversations with stakeholders, including governing boards, local officials, and the public, to protect library collections from viewpoint-based removal or restriction... Rebecka’s commitment goes beyond her own community; she has worked to ensure that all Arkansas communities can benefit from the principles we are charged to uphold.”

Arkansiana Awards

First awarded in 1979, the Arkansiana awards are given to the author(s) of a book or other work which represents a significant contribution to Arkansas heritage and culture. Two categories (adult non-fiction and juvenile non-fiction) were recognized for 2025. Monica Potts, author of *The Forgotten Girls: A Memoir of Friendship and Lost Promise in Rural America*, received the Arkansiana Award for adult non-fiction. Potts traces her own path from rural Clinton, Arkansas, to a national journalism career, while reflecting on the starkly different realities faced by the friends she left behind. With deep empathy and powerful storytelling, she examines the complex forces shaping the lives of women in the Ozarks. Stephen Koch received the Arkansiana Award for juvenile non-fiction for *From Almeda to Zilphia: Arkansas Women Who Transformed American Popular Song*. Koch’s work highlights thirty influential Arkansas women whose voices helped shape American music – from Sister Rosetta Tharpe



ArLA President Adam Webb and Stephen Koch.
Photo by Bec Caughron.

and Florence Price to K.T. Oslin and Beth Ditto. Featuring vivid portraits by artist Katherine Strause, the book celebrates generations of Arkansan cultural pioneers. Koch also served as the conference’s closing speaker, performing several songs of past Arkansas artists.

Bessie B. Moore Trustee Award

The Bessie B. Moore Trustee Award was accepted by Jean Ann Bell, Chair of the Janet and Larry Crain Memorial Library Board, on behalf of a group of fundraisers who raised \$4.3 million for the Crain Memorial Library in Searcy. The fundraisers include: Jan Smith, Fundraising Chair and White County Public Library Friends Foundation Board Member; Bell, who is also a member of the White County Regional Library System Board; Logan Cothern, a member of the White County Regional Library System Board; Paul Gardner, retired professional fundraiser; and Willie Abrams, software developer. Together, they raised more than half of the project cost for the new library, which serves as the headquarters of the White County Regional Library System and officially opened September 18, 2024, according to Darla Ino, library director of the White County Public Library System. “The Fundraisers met weekly for over three years, from 2021 to 2024, and spent innumerable volunteer hours in fundraising efforts driven by a passion to see the new library project come to fruition,” Ino said. “They were successful in bringing together financial support from individuals, businesses, foundations, and local government (city and county) – making the new library a perfect example of community-wide support for a public project.”



Darla Ino and Jean Ann Bell. Photo by Bec Caughron.

Distinguished Service Award

Carol Coffey received the Distinguished Service Award for her exceptional contributions to librarianship and unwavering service to the



Lacy Wolfe and Carol Coffey. Photo by Robin Campbell.

profession. Coffey's career reflects a deep and ongoing commitment to excellence in library service, professional leadership, and advocacy for libraries, presenter Lacy Wolf said. "As a past president of the Arkansas Library Association, she has not only provided visionary leadership but also worked tirelessly to strengthen the Association's ability to serve members and advance the profession statewide," she said.

Francis P. Neal Award

Debbie Hall received the Francis P. Neal Award, recognizing a 39-year career of notable service in librarianship. Hall's career spanned roles as reference librarian, grants coordinator, and library advocate. Hall also contributed to statewide programs, professional development, and the creation of the Arkansas Library Leadership Institute, shaping generations of library leaders. "But her final actions prior to her retirement showed her passion for libraries and her own personal courage and conviction when she spoke before Senate and House committees to try to protect both our Arkansas public libraries and the Arkansas State Library. She came prepared and spoke from the heart. It was thrilling to witness!" Ruth Hyatt said. "Debbie Hall deserves the Frances Porter Neal Award for her thirty-nine years of service, her love of libraries, and her dedication to the profession through



Debbie Hall and Ruth Hyatt. Photo by Bec Caughron.

times of opportunity and through times of difficulty."

Lorrie Shuff Paraprofessional Award

The Lorrie Shuff Paraprofessional Award was presented to Ollie Carter. Since 2002, this award has been given annually in memory of Lorrie Shuff to recognize distinguished paraprofessional service in Arkansas libraries and the Association. Carter was recognized for exceptional service to library patrons, leadership in programming, and dedication to improving library services, according to Katie Scott, Faulkner County Library Children's Librarian, who presented the award. "Ollie has led writing clubs for teens and adults and worked with both Youth Services and Adult Services programming teams to increase educational and meaningful library offerings," she said.



Ollie Carter and Katie Scott. Photo by Bec Caughron.

President's Award

Oliver Jennings was recognized by Association President Adam Webb for his exceptional service to Arkansas libraries and his pivotal work on the Arkansas Library Association's website. "From the migration to a new membership platform and website, to the untimely death of our listserv, Oliver was put through the ringer this year. But he got the job done with grace, humor, and gumption," Webb said.



Oliver Jennings and Adam Webb. Photo by Robin Campbell.

Retta Patrick Award

Amy Wallace received the Retta Patrick Award, recognizing an ArLA member providing an outstanding state or national contribution to school librarianship and school library development. Nominees must have demonstrated achievements providing an exemplary school library media program and service to the library media profession through ArLA and related organizations. Wallace is library media specialist at the Arkansas School for Math, Science, and the Arts in Hot Springs, a public residential high school supporting academically and artistically motivated students of all backgrounds throughout the state of Arkansas. Award presenter Britt Anne Murphy, director of the Bailey Library at Hendrix College in Conway, highlighted Wallace's work transforming how high school students access and use information. "She has been a bridge between school librarians and academic librarians and an enthusiastic promoter of helping Arkansas high school and college students succeed," Murphy said.



Britt Anne Murphy and Amy Wallace. Photo by Bec Caughron.



Amy Barlow and Staci Allen. Photo by Robin Campbell.

Rising Star Award

Amy Barlow received the Rising Star Award. Staci Allen presented the award and praised Barlow's collaboration efforts with location businesses, civic groups, and national foundations. "Whether she's crafting castles from cardboard or guiding patrons through genealogical discoveries, Amy embodies the heart of library service: building community, sparking imagination, and connecting people," Allen said. "Her contributions are not just impressive – they are transformative. Her creativity, generosity, and tireless spirit have made our library a place of wonder, learning, and belonging."

Suzanne Spurrier Academic Librarian Award

ArLA's Suzanne Spurrier Academic Librarian Award was presented to Jessica Riedmueller, library faculty for user experience at the University of Central Arkansas' Torreyson Library. Jessica provides outstanding support to students and faculty, according to Lacy Wolfe, Chief Operating Officer of North Little Rock Public Library System, who presented the award. "Jessica is a generous colleague and mentor, always willing to collaborate and share her knowledge," Wolfe said. "Beyond her campus, Jessica has served the profession with distinction through the Arkansas Library Association, including multiple terms on the Board as secretary. Her steady leadership and commitment to professional service strengthen our library community statewide." Given in memory of Suzanne Spurrier, former library director at Harding College, this annual award honors a current academic librarian exemplifying a spirit of outstanding service and dedicated professionalism to all library patrons, an attitude of devotion to the library profession and fellow colleagues, and consistent activity in state, regional, and national associations.



Jessica Riedmueller and Lacy Wolfe. Photo by Robin Campbell.

ArLA Scholarship

The 2025 ArLA Scholarship recipient is Fiona Davis, who received \$2,000 toward her pursuit



Scholarship recipient Fiona Davis and Amy Wallace.

of a master's degree in library and information science. Davis serves on Springdale Public Library's compassion team, providing her with opportunities to contribute to staff morale and build stronger working relationships, according to Amy Wallace, librarian at the Arkansas School for the Mathematics, Science, and the Arts and chair of ArLA's Scholarship Committee. "I am so grateful for the opportunity to award this scholarship to Fiona," Wallace said. "I can't wait to see all of the amazing things she will accomplish in her library career."

Robin Campbell is director of communications at the North Little Rock Public Library System. She is the ArLA Marketing Committee chair for 2025, and serves as the associate editor for public libraries for Arkansas Libraries.

ADMINISTRATION & MANAGEMENT: Naysayers and Unbelievers and Loyal Opposition, Oh No!

by April Sheppard, Arkansas State University

Many people who go into administration and management do so because they care greatly about the institution and the people within. This is especially true for people like myself who find themselves accidental administrators (even now, "administrator" feels like a dirty word). I didn't begin my library career with goals of ever becoming an associate dean, or even a department head. What led me towards leadership was my experience working with bad leaders. I've witnessed the detrimental effects of bad management on morale, culture, and employee health too many times. I saw talented colleagues leave, projects stall, and entire departments fall into distrust because a leader did not know how to listen, support, or even simply treat people with dignity. Because of this experience, anytime there was an opening and the choice was between me or an unknown outside force, I stepped in. I didn't know how successful I would be as an administrator, but I knew I would give it my all and



Sheppard

I wasn't going to risk my library and my people to potential outside harm.

It's because of this drive to do good that I was very surprised, and hurt, when I discovered that a part of administration and management is dealing with employees who think negatively of you just because of the role that you serve. It can be hard to not take it personally as a reflection of you or the job you do. You may even feel that you need to "fix" things and find ways to make everyone like you. But, it's not possible. Perfect doesn't exist and there's nothing that will convince everyone or make everyone happy (Mayer & Elliot, 2025). And while insubordination and disgruntledness are obvious problems that need to be addressed, surprisingly, loyal opposition isn't always a bad thing. In fact, it can be incredibly valuable. Part of growing as a manager is learning to be comfortable with some pushback and understanding where it stems from, what fears or values are behind it, and how it can ultimately contribute to healthier decision-making. Leadership, at its best, is a practice of navigating tensions rather than eliminating them.

Understanding the Environment You Inherit

We have to keep in mind the environment and culture that we are stepping into. Remember those bad leaders I mentioned before? Those weren't solo experiences – everyone experienced and saw the same detriments. They shaped the culture. They shaped expectations. And they shaped the emotional memory of the organization. Leaders inherit the work of the people before them, meaning that no matter how much we want to start fresh, we are tied to our

predecessors (Honan, 2025). Of course people are wary. They don't know you as a leader yet. They've seen cycles before: promises made and broken, transparency claimed but not practiced, and listening solicited but not honored. It is unrealistic to expect employees to immediately trust your leadership just because you asked them to. Trust doesn't work that way. It is historical, cumulative, and often, bruised.

We must realize that no matter how transparent and communicative we are, our employees can't look into our minds and see our true intentions. They see the role and previous pattern before they see the individual person. Give grace and time to your new employees. I have learned that patience and consistency are our best tools to quiet the naysayers. You build credibility one decision at a time. You show up. You follow through. You explain your reasoning. And you admit when you're wrong. You can win (most) people over.

The Value and Challenges of Loyal Opposition

Some employees serve as loyal opposition. While employees may not necessarily be loyal to the people in management positions, they may be loyal to the institution and its mission. Their critiques often come from a place of deep care. They may have strong opinions on how to best achieve the institution's goals and visions. In libraries, they may have ideas that differ from yours on how to best provide service to patrons, how to steward resources, or how to protect library employees.

Loyal opposition is not simply complaining. It is a form of engagement. According to organizational theorist Mary Parker Follett, constructive conflict is the root of progress. She noted over a century ago that variety is necessary for unity, stating that "Differences must be integrated, not annihilated" (1918). Employees who question decisions force us to articulate our thinking more clearly. They help reveal blind spots. They bring alternative perspectives that we may overlook. They keep decisions grounded in lived reality instead of abstract policy.

Of course, loyal opposition can be uncomfortable. It slows things down. It introduces friction and it demands explanation and justification that, in the moment, can feel like obstacles. But discomfort is not the same as dysfunction. An organization that allows respectful disagreement is an organization that allows growth.

Silence is the Real Warning

Opposition and complaints (within reason) can actually be seen as a sign of a healthy organization.

If employees feel comfortable enough to speak up, it means they still believe their voice matters. They have some level of trust that leadership will listen or at least consider their input. In a quote attributed to Tim McClure, "the biggest concern of an organization should be when their most passionate people become quiet." Silence does not signal satisfaction; it often signals resignation. Resignation is far more dangerous than resistance. A resistant employee is still invested. A resigned employee has checked out mentally and emotionally long before they ever submit a resignation letter.

When people stop raising concerns, it may mean they've concluded it won't matter. Perhaps historically, speaking up resulted in retaliation or dismissal. Perhaps they've seen initiatives come and go without meaningful impact. Or perhaps they simply no longer have the emotional bandwidth to fight for the institution they once cared deeply about.

For managers, the task is not to suppress dissent but to differentiate between destructive negativity and constructive critique. Creating spaces where people feel safe to question decisions, even decisions you feel confident about, is essential for organizational resilience. Something as simple as saying, "Help me understand your concern," can transform an adversarial moment into a collaborative one.

Management is more about people than policies. It is surprisingly social. We can't lead alone. We need people to fill in the gaps of our own knowledge and expertise, and we need people to help check our biases and decision-making. Even the best administrators make mistakes or miss critical pieces of information. Embracing those who challenge us, who push us, and who question us keeps us grounded and helps ensure our decisions truly serve the institution and its people. Leadership is not about eliminating conflict; it's about shepherding it wisely.

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April Sheppard is the associate dean of Arkansas State University's Dean B. Ellis Library in Jonesboro, Arkansas and is the associate editor for academic libraries for Arkansas Libraries.

ADVOCACY ARKANSAS: Partnership Power-Ups

by *Allie Stevens Gosselink*, *Calhoun County Library & Museum*

Community building through partnerships is one of the strongest advocacy tools available to us, especially when we can use library resources (not just financially, but in the form of time and talents) to lift up the missions of other organizations doing work that aligns with our values of serving everyone, meeting people where they are, and providing trustworthy information. Current times are providing lots of challenges for the people we serve in a variety of contexts, which, through another lens, are also opportunities for the library to flex its power to connect people with resources and be a force for good in a community. There are many of these community-strengthening partnerships happening in our libraries across the state already; here are a few favorite examples from a variety of library sizes.

Faulkner County Library has partnered with their local Kiwanis for 18 years to provide bookcases and starter collections of books for children's homes. While many of our systems don't have the capacity to do this for 50 families per year, I find myself thinking about local woodworkers who could volunteer a shelf or two, and how meaningful this could be to some of the kids in my community who receive their Dolly Parton Imagination Library books each month but may not have a bookshelf of their own to fill.

On that note, some libraries partner with the Imagination Library, as well. My own local school district holds the funds for our county's program, but **Calhoun County Library** works as a partner to fundraise, manage local registration, and act as the contact for the county chapter. This partnership doesn't require very much, but serves as another connection point between the library and many children in the county.

The **Barton Library branch of Union County Public Library System** has a recurring storytime partnership with the El Dorado Service League, an organization serving disadvantaged youth in the area. Organizations who can be trusted to execute these sorts of programs are such wonderful partnerships to



Gosselink

leverage for those of us in rural areas in particular, because we often don't have the luxury of giving a storytime our undivided attention, but we can provide a connection point to young people who might be able to benefit from these organizations outside of storytime.

The youth-focused nonprofit organization Bridge 2 Success partners with **North Little Rock Public Library** to provide daily meals and snacks intended to be consumed in the library. This large-scale operation not only feeds a significant number of people, it also brings people into the library where library staff have the opportunity to connect their community members with more of what the library has to offer. Another such partnership is between Special Olympics Arkansas (SOAR) and many of the public libraries around the state, providing backpacks filled with activities geared toward motor skill development, available for children both with and without intellectual disabilities.

I have a confession to make here. My library is not one of those currently partnered with SOAR to provide the Young Athletes backpacks. Even after over a decade in the field, in the same library no less, things slip through the cracks and valuable partnerships are overlooked in the busy-ness of all the things that are happening. A recent workshop session I attended posed the idea of setting a monthly or even weekly quota for reaching out to a potential partner, and I think I will make that one of my professional goals for 2026, beginning with SOAR.

This partnership may be one that my library specifically has been missing out on, but there are undoubtedly lots of other partnership opportunities in all of our communities that we may be overlooking. ALA, in partnership with Unite Against Book Bans, recently announced a new initiative with the pro-democracy Interfaith Alliance to oppose censorship and defend intellectual freedom, with ALA President Sam Helmick speaking to the "ministry of service" that libraries have long represented in their communities. We know, though the national narrative doesn't always reflect it, that our local faith organizations and our library services frequently align quite well.

What other organizations are we missing partnerships with? Here are two I have discovered recently that I am adding to my 2026 partnership contact quota (other than Special Olympics Arkansas... I still can't believe I don't have those backpacks available already). The Electronic Frontier Foundation, a 35-year-old national nonprofit organization whose work is in the free

speech and digital privacy space, provides some excellent toolkits along with digital privacy and anti-surveillance training and extensive research. More locally and more recently founded, Arkansas Strong is a nonprofit platform writing about the joys and difficulties of living in the Natural State, covering topics from hunting to literacy to Arkansas history (including one really great article about an Arkansas school librarian).

Politics may make for strange bedfellows, as the saying goes, but overlap in organizational values makes for strong coalition-building, something that particular forces at work against us sure seem to have figured out. In the face of group-instigated censorship attempts and pile-ons of library staff stirred up online, we know that the strength of a library is reflected in its actual engagement with community members across all divisions. I'd like to challenge us all to think critically about our communities from the perspective of what we

might offer others, and to spend time reaching out and listening to other organizations' needs with the goal of finding ways the library can support the work they are doing in our own towns and cities. If you're curious about how to identify and evaluate the potential partnerships in your community, stay tuned for the next Advocacy Arkansas column! Arkansas library director and ArLA Secretary Misty Hawkins will share her expertise in Community Asset Mapping and how to use it as a valuable and effective tool for bringing together cross-organizational perspectives and ideas – great for identifying not just who can help the library, but also whom the library can help.

Allie Stevens Gosselink is director of the Calhoun County Library & Museum in Hampton, Arkansas and a member of ArLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee.

Collaborations, Alliances, Updates, and College Readiness: **COSLLE's 2025 Summer Conference**

by Rachel Shankles

COSLLE Co-Chair

A group of 35 school librarians and academic librarians from around the state gathered in the Grand Hall of ASU Three Rivers in Malvern, AR on July 26, 2025 for the annual Community of School Librarians and Library Educators' summer conference. COSLLE is ArLA's community of interest for elementary and secondary school librarians and has provided professional development in different ways during the school year or during the summer. The past two summers it has presented six hours of staff development on current topics in different areas of the state.

Rachel Shankles and Quanta Wyatt are the 2025 co-chairs of COSLLE and decided the theme for this summer would be connected to the alliances that are being presented at different conferences in the state. Prof. Britt Anne Murphy has worked for several years to form alliances with the Conway school librarians. She has collaborated with Cassandra



Shankles

Barnett of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to try to form such alliances in other parts of the state with an academic librarian collaborating with the schools in his or her area/county. Also part of the group pushing for such alliances is Jean Waldrop of Harding University Library and Karen Haggard who is now retired but was a school and college librarian most recently at UA Fort Smith. Britt, Jean and Karen, along with April Sheppard of Arkansas State University – Jonesboro, formed a panel the previous fall at ArLA's conference and presented about their work along these lines thus far. Rachel invited them all to replicate the panel at COSLLE's one day conference. April was not available, so Alan Robinette of ASU Three River took her part on the panel. Their presentation was an eye-opening session with many questions. They broke the group into smaller ones to discuss different things, and they didn't even want to stop for lunch!

Cassandra Barnett started the day with "Just One Summer Separates High School Seniors from College Freshman." She introduced what this consortium is trying to do around the state and gave the background details. She reminded the participants that students taking college credit classes need more info on using the college library and basic research skills. Surveys have been conducted with faculty and students to ask what areas those bi-vocational

students needed more learning in to be successful in college.

After a catered lunch from Salsa's in Hot Springs, Adam Webb, president-elect of ArLA and director of Garland County Public Library, spoke about this past legislative session and how ArLA advocated for school librarians. He mentioned each law that passed and each one that failed to pass. He awaits the appointments to the State Library Board in hopes it supports the work of school, public, college and other libraries. He also spoke on behalf of school librarians joining ArLA for a \$25 institutional membership fee.

Lastly, Cassandra spoke about updates to library rules and regulations and how to deal with the new law for elementary school libraries. She also presented programming for the celebration of America's 250th anniversary (or semiquincentennial) of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026. She had a ton of books to give away as well. Most of our school librarians have specific questions to ask

her this time of year about duty, size of classes, prep time requirements and duty outside the library.

After a QR code for the evaluation was made available, the certificates for the six hours of credit were passed out to take home and give to principals or enter in their tool box.

A big thanks to Alan Robinette and his amazing assistant Robin who helped with everything. Touring the Three Rivers library was a plus for all who attended. It is fabulous. We hope to see more school librarians next year join ArLA and our Community of School Librarians!

Rachel Shankles is a retired high school librarian and LIS instructor, and has authored children's books. She has served as president of both the Arkansas Library Association and the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media (AAIM).

SCHOOL LIBRARIES:

Succession Planning in the High School Library: A Catalog Crisis

by Catherine Dean, Fouke Elementary School

Succession planning is a perennial problem, but it is especially exacerbated in school libraries. Those of us who work at schools are all familiar with “the shuffle.” Every May (or sometimes even in late July or early August) a classroom teacher announces they are leaving, and suddenly, the longtime fifth-grade teacher is transitioning to a kinder classroom, newly certified paras are moving into teaching roles, and before we know it, the ripples reach across the district, leaving no building untouched. That doesn't even begin to address the issue of only accessing your new room for a handful of days before students return if you're lucky. Such was the case in Fall 2025 that brought the Fouke Elementary's ISS paraprofessional to the high school library. Little did she know, she would be faced with an enormous undertaking.

In terms of library management, Fouke School District has used Library Concept's PC Card Catalog for well over a decade. It looks and feels like



Dean

Windows '98, and that's likely because the desktop client was copyrighted in 2003. But it's served our small population well enough over the years and fits comfortably in our annual budget. The downside is that, unlike newer web-based platforms, PC Card Catalog is installed on an individual user's profile on networked PCs and relies on manual backups in the event of a system failure. Suffice it to say that somewhere in that fateful summer shuffle, the most recent data from the system was lost, and the new librarian walked in on day one to an endless series of roadblocks.

She didn't have a faculty login; so, she was assigned a previous library employee's credentials. The system support had expired. As the elementary librarian at the same district, I attempted to help where I could. I shared the previous fall's support code, only to realize it had also expired. Our Library Concepts representative refreshed the code, and weeks into the new school year, she *finally* got into the PC Card Catalog only to learn that she couldn't check books in or out. Barcodes weren't pulling up titles. The patron file was empty. But this is why we have backups! We scoured the PC for the backup file. District IT searched for it. Eventually, the high school librarian's search turned up three old flash drives – our last hope. Of the two drives that contained promising files, the most recent options were from 2019.

While devastating, this outcome was certainly preferable to a complete reset; so, we restored the system to the most recent backup we could find.

With only a few quick lessons on cataloging and processing books, the high school librarian dove into the task headfirst and has made incredible progress in the last couple of months, transferring the paper records she had been keeping into the system and bringing it back up to date. She is currently comparing a printed item list (that someone mercifully thought to leave behind!) to her fiction section in order to identify books that need to be added to the system. She's made it all the way to the Zs. Next, she plans to tackle the nonfiction books.

This crisis points to a larger problem: how do we prepare for and address abrupt staffing changes in school libraries – especially when many schools do not have a certified library media specialist who is trained to take on the role? Administrators are not usually familiar with the ins and outs of administering a library management system (LMS) and likely don't realize the kind of pickle they could throw an unsuspecting para into, even in an ideal situation. Having worked with SirsiDynix Workflows, WorldShare Management System, and now PC Card Catalog over the course of my career, I am all too aware that every LMS has its own quirks and flaws. When no one is around to show you the ropes, you're left to discover them through good old trial and error. I at least had the benefit of understanding the general theory behind relational databases thanks to my MLIS program. Not as much can be said for many classroom teachers-turned-librarians or paraprofessionals who had little choice in their placement.

While public and university libraries are no strangers to staff turnover, they *typically* have the benefit of having multiple staff members who at least have a vague awareness of their colleagues' day-to-day operations. In some cases, they may even be cross-trained in each other's duties, or the employee on her way out manages to scrape together a list of passwords and contacts for those left in her wake. At the very least, the library director can typically arrange for new staff training with vendors thanks to service agreements.

It's a different ballgame in school libraries, where there is typically only one library media specialist in the building or sometimes even the district. Some fortunate campuses do have a dedicated library aide, but that is far from the norm. School librarians who join in on the specials rotation have additional time constraints when it comes to completing administrative tasks. All that said, planning for a (sometimes unexpected) departure and replacement is low on the priority list. Unfortunately, the alternative means that some future library media



specialist will be faced with the prospect of training herself on the day-to-day operations of a library from the ground up with no guidance, all while minimizing disruption to services. Perhaps the best solution would be to maintain an ongoing file of local cataloging specifications, workflows, and other important details, but that's certainly not something I've ever walked into or succeeded in leaving behind for the next person.

In any case, you can bet I ran a backup today.

My goal for the next column is to outline some basic documents and definitions that might ease a brand new school librarian into their role, and I would love to hear succession stories, whether failures or successes, from other librarians (school, public, or academic) in the state. What has worked well for you? What did you have to learn the hard way? What do you wish someone had left behind? Please share your stories with me at catherine.dean@foukepanthers.org.

Catherine Dean is the library media specialist at Fouke Elementary School located in the southwest corner of Arkansas.



Santa Claus visits Faulkner County Public Library (FCL). Photo by FCL Marketing Manager Kenya Böes.

Called to Serve: *Black Librarians, Professional Communities, and the Weight of Representation*

by *Lavoris Martin*

Coleman Elementary School

"I was the only Black librarian on the committee – again."

The room might change. The agenda might shift. But for many Black librarians, professional service experience remains remarkably familiar: overextended, under-acknowledged, and rarely equitable.



Martin

Serving on committees has long been considered a hallmark of leadership in librarianship. It's a path to promotion, a way to shape policy, and ideally a means of building community. However, that sense of duty often carries extra weight for Black librarians. It's not just about doing the job; it is about being seen as a representative, working to mend systems that weren't built with them in mind, and constantly navigating the often unspoken and sometimes very visible racial dynamics woven into the profession.

A History of Exclusion and Resilience

Librarianship has long struggled with issues of race. Black librarians have played a crucial role in shaping libraries, building archives, and advancing literacy in their communities, but for too long, their work has been overlooked or undervalued. In 1970, the founding of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) was not just a pivotal point; it was a powerful response to being left out of the conversation for far too long. BCALA and similar affinity groups have long served as essential counter-spaces, places where Black professionals could lead, breathe, and innovate.

Mainstream professional spaces have been slow to change despite these efforts. Committees across national and state-level organizations often remain predominantly white. For Black librarians, being asked to serve on these committees can feel like walking into a room where you're simultaneously hyper-visible and unheard.

The Labor Behind the Seat at the Table

People often assume that making a committee more diverse means adding a few people of color. But what is rarely discussed is the cost of well-

intentioned inclusion. Black librarians are often asked or sometimes expected to serve on "diversity" or "equity" committees, whether or not they are interested or have relevant expertise. It is as if just being Black automatically makes someone responsible for fixing institutional problems.

Even when they join general or subject-based committees, their insights are often filtered through the lens of race, not simply seen as valuable contributions on their own merit.

And that's where the paradox lies: service is constantly expected, but rarely fully recognized. In academic libraries, it might be listed in promotion or tenure guidelines as a form of "professional engagement," but it's often treated as a formality, a checkbox. Unlike teaching or publishing, service work tends to be invisible. The long hours spent writing reports, mentoring new colleagues, navigating microaggressions, or dealing with the emotional weight of being dismissed or talked over, none of that makes it into performance reviews.

What's more frustrating is that some Black librarians are even told to "dial back the service work" and "focus more on scholarship," advice that's rarely given to white peers, whose committee roles are often celebrated as prestigious or strategic.

Rethinking Professional Communities

What if we reimagined professional service as something rooted in shared responsibility, not something that falls along racial lines? That shift must start with being honest about who is carrying the load. Organizations must pay attention to who is being asked to serve, who is saying no, and what those patterns reveal. Committee chairs should look hard at how power shows up in meetings, who gets heard, who gets credit, and how feedback lands.

Affinity groups and caucuses still play a crucial role. They provide safety, community, and a place to lead without explaining yourself. But they shouldn't have to act like separate systems to get things done. Professional associations must commit to lasting change if they genuinely care about equity going beyond surface-level diversity.

The Ask and the Future

To my fellow Black librarians: know that your labor is seen, even when it is not officially acknowledged, and it matters. Your presence changes the room, even when your words are met with silence. And your insistence on building better structures, even when exhausted, is a form of

leadership.

To the broader profession: it's time to stop calling this "service" and start calling it what it is: expertise, labor, and often, sacrifice. If we want truly inclusive professional communities, we must be willing to reallocate the weight, not just diversify the roster.

Because service should not be a punishment for

visibility, it should be a shared act of building the profession we all deserve.

Lavoris Martin, MSCST, MLS, MLSTEd, is the librarian at Coleman Elementary, part of the Watson Chapel School District in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

ARKANSAS BOOKS & AUTHORS

by *Jessica Sawyer*

Central Arkansas Library System

The Mysterious Benedict Society by Trenton Lee Stewart

Arkansas author Trenton Lee Stewart published *The Mysterious Benedict Society* in 2007; it has been well lauded, living on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over a year, winning the E. B. White Read Aloud Award, and being listed as a Top 10 Children's Book Sense Pick.

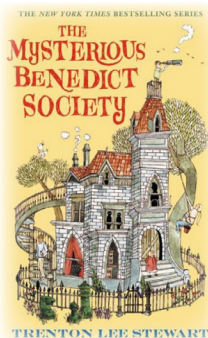


Sawyer

The Mysterious Benedict Society follows four "exceptionally gifted" children who are given the secret mission to infiltrate the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened and stop the head of the institute, Mr. Curtain, from enacting his plan. These children face many physical and mental challenges along the way and must learn how to work together to complete their goal, even when it's more difficult than they imagined.

This book is understood to be geared towards a younger audience, with the majority of the main characters being 11 or 12 years old, and Stewart's language in this book follows suit. With a general reading level of 3rd -7th grade, this book is easy to follow and understand, with some potential new vocabulary words for younger readers interspersed.

Don't let this book's simplicity fool you,



though; *The Mysterious Benedict Society* can be enjoyed by readers of all ages! The story's plot was interesting, and I thoroughly enjoyed following the children on their journey to stop Mr. Curtain's Improvement from being deployed. Stewart also delved into some real-life topics in this novel like facing fears, teamwork in a diverse

group, critical thinking, and compassion/empathy, which are useful for readers young and old.

One specific thing about this book that I enjoyed was Stewart's naming of things. Reading this book for the first time as an adult, it would've been easy to overlook the obvious naming scheme; for example, Kate Wetherall being an extremely overprepared child and able to 'weather all things', or Constance Contraire being the most obstinate and headstrong child in the group. However, this way of naming things made me pay more attention to the characters and the story because I wanted to see how the characters lived up to their names while facing their challenges. It quickly became one of my favorite things about the book, which I was not expecting.

There were a couple times near the beginning of the book that I got confused when Mr. Benedict was describing the Emergency and the messages to the children, but other than that I don't have much to critique. "The Mysterious Benedict Society" was a well written and all-around enjoyable novel, worthy of its accolades!

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Jessica Sawyer obtained her BAs in English and History and AA in General Education Science from Central Baptist College. She is a library assistant in the Information Services department at CALS' main building in Little Rock. Sawyer's hobbies include knitting and philately, and she is currently working on a non-fiction work about postage stamps and their importance to historical research. One of her favorite books series is The Invisible Library series by Genevieve Cogman.

YOUTH SERVICES

My Favorite Books from 2025

by *Mary Spears Polk, Faulkner County Library*

I love youth books. I love recommending them. I love gifting them. I love reading them. Here are some of my favorites from 2025. These titles were not necessarily newly published in 2025, but they are new-ish books that played a significant role in my library work in 2025.



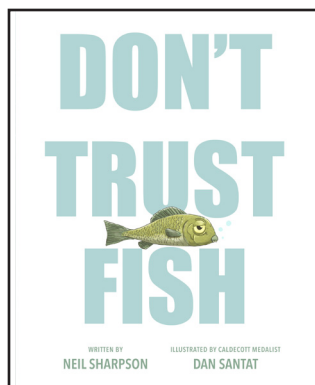
Polk

Board Book(s)

The Shapes Trilogy by Jon Klassen & Mac Barnett. Klassen & Barnett are personal heroes. Their version of the Three Billy Goats Gruff is a frequent storytime read aloud for me. The board book versions of *The Shapes Trilogy* (Triangle, Square, & Circle) give our youngest readers a sturdy introduction to shapes and perspective while caregivers get a dose of what Klassen and Barnett do best, humor. If you are a fan as well, these stories are also the inspiration for Shape Island on Apple TV.

Preschool/Early Elementary

Don't Trust Fish by Neil Sharpson, illustrated by Dan Santat. This is my favorite book of 2025! This absurd and hilarious nature guide gone wrong provides many reasons for not trusting fish. The twist led to great discussions about unreliable narrators, persuasive writing, and propaganda when I read this at elementary schools in May to promote summer reading programs. Second grade is usually the age when



kids can guess the twist, and younger kids love the ridiculousness. Dan Santat's illustrations bring the text to life and add to the humor. Showcasing a new style, Santat continues to showcase his versatility.

Upper Middle Grade

Simon Sort of Says by Erin Bow. This book is laugh out loud funny. There are certain passages that, when I read them aloud, make me feel like a successful stand-up comedian. The story about Simon's dad and the blessing of the animals is a

delight no matter how many times I read it. The humor is balanced by some of the most incredibly thoughtful and careful writing about trauma and its impact on a family unit that I have encountered. There is also a decent dash of science. Did you know that there is a real US National Radio Quiet Zone where there are no mobile phones allowed?



Young Adult

Meet Me at Blue Hour by Sarah Suk. This novel can be described as both science fiction and



romance. With plot points reminiscent of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, two childhood friends navigate the consequences of memory erasure. While the main characters are Canadian, the setting is Busan, South Korea. I was particularly struck by the story of a secondary character whose mother died. Her father was so stricken

with grief that he erased his wife from his memories. The ensuing relationship challenges between the daughter who remembers her mom and the father who doesn't is provocative in a way that hurts your heart but makes you consider who we are with and without our grief.

What are your favorite youth books of 2025? I would love to know! Email me at mary@fcl.org and I will read them.

Mary Spears Polk is the Youth Services manager for the Faulkner County Library and the 2025 ArLA Youth Services Community of Interest Chair. She loves wild things and named one of her sons Max, but wonders if anyone out there named a son Shel after Mr. Silverstein.

SPECIAL LIBRARIES

When Two Worlds Collide: The SLA + ASIS&T Merger

by *Sonya Lemke, Arkansas Colleges of Health Education*

Special libraries, those mission-driven, highly specialized information centers embedded in law firms, corporations, government agencies, nonprofits, and more, have always occupied a distinctive space in the information landscape. Their strength lies in deep domain expertise, agility, and a service model tailored to highly specific user needs. Yet these libraries have also faced persistent challenges: shrinking memberships, limited funding, and questions about how to remain relevant in an increasingly digital and decentralized environment.

The recent vote by members of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) to dissolve the organization and merge with the Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) marks a major turning point. Both associations approved the merger with strong majorities. This process is described as a strategic realignment, not a takeover. While it presents genuine opportunities, it also raises important questions about professional identity and community.

SLA, founded in 1909, has served for more than a century as a professional home for librarians working in specialized settings. It has excelled in practitioner-focused training, strong domain communities, and user-centered service. At the same time, it has struggled with financial pressures, declining membership, and uneven sustainability across its chapters and divisions. Recent financial reports showed that annual expenses were outpacing revenue, a trend that threatened long-term viability.

ASIS&T, by contrast, has deep roots in research and scholarship. It publishes influential journals, convenes internationally recognized conferences, and shapes global discourse in information science and technology. While academically strong, ASIS&T has historically been less focused on practitioner engagement and on maintaining the localized or domain-specific networks that SLA fostered for decades.

The rationale for merging is straightforward:



Lemke

bring together SLA's practitioner networks and domain expertise with ASIS&T's research infrastructure, publication platforms, and global reach. Ideally, this creates a unified association capable of bridging theory and practice, revitalizing practitioner participation in information science scholarship, and achieving greater administrative efficiency. There is also discussion about the merged organization pursuing membership in international professional bodies, which could broaden its influence even further.

There is real promise in this vision. Many information professionals already find themselves working at the intersection of research, practice, industry, and government. A merged association can better reflect that reality. SLA members may help anchor ASIS&T's academic orientation with applied perspectives, creating space for case-driven inquiry and practitioner-informed research agendas. Consolidation may also reduce the financial and operational risks that come with running two small organizations.

But the risks are equally real. The culture, history, and brand identity of the SLA are important to its members, and dissolving the organization could risk these aspects being less prominent within a larger group. Some SLA communities may not map cleanly onto existing ASIS&T groups, raising concerns about representation and continuity. If priorities lean too heavily toward academic interests, the practical work of special librarians, knowledge management, intranet strategy, competitive intelligence, focused information services, could lose visibility or support. Concerns have also been expressed by members regarding dues, benefits, the structure of conferences, and the sustainability of programs during the transition.

For SLA members, staying engaged is essential as the process moves forward. Understanding who will make decisions about budgets, priorities, special interest groups, and conferences will be important. Clarity is needed about how legacy SLA communities will be represented and how chapters and divisions will transition under the new structure. Advocacy will be necessary to ensure professional development opportunities continue to meet the needs of working special librarians. There is also an important role for encouraging new programs that deliberately connect scholarship with practice, including translational research and real-world case studies. Above all, members should insist on transparent, two-way communication throughout the transition.

Special librarians are accustomed to navigating

uncertainty, adapting quickly, and solving problems with limited resources. This merger represents another form of adaptation, imperfect, complex, and potentially transformative. If managed well, a merged SLA/ASIS&T could offer the kind of professional home that modern information workers need: one that spans research and practice, supports both specialization and cross-domain innovation, and reflects the diverse realities of today's information environments.

Do not sit back and let the merger unfold without your voice. Engage, ask questions, volunteer for

transition work, and hold leadership accountable. This moment will shape the future of special librarianship. Your participation will help determine whether the new organization becomes a stronger, more inclusive professional home or simply a structural consolidation.

Sonya Lemke is the access and systems librarian at the Arkansas Colleges of Health Education's Taylor Health Sciences Library in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Between Books and Benchmarks: A Librarian's Role in Coordinating ATLAS Testing

by *Lavoris Martin*, Coleman Elementary

Each school year, my library goes through three predictable, yet dramatic, transformations.

In the fall, winter, and again in the spring, the familiar shelves, reading nooks, and STEM stations are temporarily replaced by rows of devices and carefully arranged seating for our Arkansas Teaching, Learning & Assessment SYstem (ATLAS) Interim assessments. Then, as the school year nears its end, the space shifts once more to host the high-stakes ATLAS Summative assessments. As both the building test coordinator and the school librarian, I'm constantly balancing two identities: protecting the library's heart and culture, while also managing the school's largest and most essential testing space.

These recurring cycles of interim and summative testing shape the rhythm of the school year for many Arkansas librarians. The testing windows come with their own expectations, timelines, data needs, and logistical challenges. And yet, the library remains at the center of it all: a flexible, tech-equipped, calm, and centrally located space that naturally becomes the testing hub.

The ATLAS Interim assessments act as important mid-year check-ins, giving teachers and administrators an early look at how students are growing. For librarians, though, these checkpoints come with a surprising amount of behind-the-scenes



Martin

work. Chromebooks have to be updated, counted, and fully charged. Student accommodations must be double-checked to make sure everyone gets what they need. And then there are the seating charts, testing groups, and proctor schedules that all have to be organized before the first student ever logs in. Even the layout of the library must shift to minimize distractions and maintain security. Though interim testing spans only a few days, it requires coordination several weeks in advance.

Once the testing window opens, the library shifts from its usual energetic hum to a focused and quiet atmosphere. Students enter ready – or sometimes not so prepared – to show what they know. With these tests, teachers assess their students in classrooms, using the results to help place them into designated small groups. Meanwhile, the librarian steps into a different role, acting as a hall monitor and providing support with questions, addressing technical issues, and supervising students who need to be moved out of their classroom to take tests in the library. Teachers pick up the secure testing materials, while other staff members are responsible for bringing their groups to the library. Once students arrive, the librarian becomes a calm, steady presence – helping teachers and students, troubleshooting devices, and guiding them through the sometimes unfamiliar pressures of assessment. After the initial rounds of testing are complete, the librarian then shifts to coordinating make-up sessions, which are held in the library and any other available spaces throughout the school. Once several days of testing across grade levels conclude, the library returns briefly to its regular programming, though never for long. As soon as interim results are analyzed and instructional plans adjusted, it feels as if preparations for the spring summative season have already begun.

Summative testing in the spring carries more weight, not only for students and teachers but for the school as a whole. This is where test security,

documentation, technology consistency, and strict timing procedures become paramount. For librarians serving as test coordinators, the responsibilities expand. Secure materials must be handled carefully. Testing irregularities must be prevented and documented when necessary. Communication must flow clearly between administrators, teachers, proctors, and support staff; every minute of the schedule matters. Every student must be accounted for.

Make-up testing becomes another significant component of the librarian's role during the summative window. Absences, appointments, and unexpected illnesses mean students often arrive one at a time for testing. These smaller sessions offer opportunities for meaningful connection. Students who may be quiet in the classroom sometimes open up during these one-on-one sessions. They share what books they are reading, what they are nervous about, or what they hope to do over summer break. In these small moments, the testing environment becomes more than a requirement; it becomes an opportunity to support students' emotional well-being.

Balancing testing duties with ongoing library responsibilities requires constant flexibility. A typical testing-season day might include shelving books between sessions, troubleshooting a Chromebook, preparing a make-up test for a student arriving late, and fielding questions from teachers about schedules or accommodations. Library classes may need to be adjusted, held in classrooms, or split into shorter lessons. Sometimes other activities or events land right in the middle of testing season, forcing a bit of juggling and a lot of communication. Even with all the moving pieces, librarians still find ways to protect the heart of the library program. Keeping the

library's identity intact during testing is important. Even when desks take the place of reading rugs and Chromebooks sit where novels usually rest, I do my best to keep the space feeling like a library. The displays stay up, the soft lighting stays on, and I make sure students still feel welcomed the moment they walk through the door. Encouraging signs greet students as they enter. When testing concludes and the last student submits their final section, I make no delay in returning the library to its natural state: inviting, vibrant, and full of the joy of reading.

The work of coordinating ATLAS interim and summative testing may not always be visible, but it is essential. Librarians bring a unique skill set to the task, including organization, attention to detail, technology fluency, the ability to remain calm under pressure, and a deep understanding of student needs. We support teachers, guide students, and hold together the logistics that make school wide testing possible.

In Arkansas schools, the role of the librarian continues to evolve. Testing coordination is one more example of how librarians adapt to serve their school communities. It is a role grounded in service, shaped by flexibility, and strengthened by the relationships built every day in the library. When students walk into the testing room, whether for an interim checkpoint or a spring summative, they find a familiar space and a familiar face. And when testing ends, they return to a library ready to welcome them back with stories, curiosity, and a sense of belonging.

Lavoris Martin is the elementary librarian and building test coordinator for Coleman Elementary in the Watson Chapel School District in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Uniting Arkansas for Open Education *Reflections from Open Arkansas 2025*

by *Christine Rickabaugh*

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville

Open Arkansas 2025 brought together over 120 passionate stakeholders from across the state at North Arkansas College on Friday, October 3, to explore the impact and future of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Arkansas. The conference welcomed a diverse range of roles and institutions, all united by a shared commitment to advancing open education.

The day began with an inspiring keynote address

from Dr. David Wiley of Marshall University, a nationally recognized leader in OER and open pedagogy. Dr. Wiley discussed both the promise and challenges of scaling open resources, sharing insights on using generative artificial intelligence to create or revise resources, improving access, and leveraging statewide strategies for lasting impact. His address set a forward-looking tone, encouraging attendees not only to adopt open practices but also to help lead Arkansas as an example of innovation and equity in education.

Attendees had the opportunity to choose from

sixteen sessions covering themes of technology, collaboration, pedagogy, and statewide infrastructure. Several sessions explored how artificial intelligence and open tools are transforming OER creation and revision, while others addressed accessibility, faculty collaboration, and strategies for sustaining open initiatives. These sessions collectively reflected the maturing of OER efforts in Arkansas – from initial adoption and affordability initiatives to systemic planning, cross-institutional partnerships, and ongoing improvement.

A hallmark of the conference was the impressive diversity of institutions represented by both presenters and attendees. Participants came from colleges and universities across Arkansas and neighboring states. The event was collaboratively planned by representatives from NorthWest Arkansas Community College, Cossatot Community College of the University of Arkansas, North Arkansas College, University of Arkansas-Fort Smith, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, and Arkansas Tech University, highlighting the broad partnership at the core of Arkansas's open education movement. Registered attendees included faculty, librarians, students, administrators, and nonprofit partners such as the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund. The event showcased the rich collaborations forming across institutions and disciplines to promote open education throughout the state.

A recurring theme was the increasing recognition of how OER intersects with statewide strategies for

student transferability and academic alignment. A key panel discussion emphasized the opportunity to align common course numbers with common learning outcomes, ensuring that Arkansas students transferring between institutions carry the same foundational skills. While common course numbering already indicates that courses should be taught at similar academic levels, connecting these numbers to shared course outcomes, especially for general education courses, could facilitate the curation or creation of a small set of high-quality, open textbooks and learning materials that support those outcomes intentionally. This would give instructors confidence that transfer students have the necessary competencies. Such an approach would reduce duplication and costs while ensuring students experience consistent and equitable learning outcomes as they progress through Arkansas's higher education system. By using common course numbering as a basis for aligning outcomes, Arkansas could strengthen transfer pathways and accelerate OER adoption, empowering faculty and benefiting students.

Throughout the conference, participants discussed various parallel strategies to remove barriers across institutions, including improving repository access, designing statewide OER professional development initiatives, and ensuring that open materials are accessible to learners with diverse needs. These conversations reflect a shared vision: creating cohesive systems that reduce



Dr. David Wiley of Marshall University gives his keynote address, Synergies at the Intersection of OER and Generative AI. Photo by Brandon Cone, North Arkansas College.

friction, enhance transparency, and prioritize student success.

As feedback from attendees poured in, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Participants praised the broad range of topics, hands-on demonstrations, and the collaborative spirit. The sessions that drew standing-room-only crowds underscored the energy behind open education in Arkansas and the desire for continued statewide collaboration. A major theme was the importance of maintaining this momentum and establishing Open Arkansas as an annual event for sharing strategies, celebrating achievements, and advancing shared

goals.

Looking forward, the Open Arkansas community remains dedicated to expanding access to affordable learning materials and promoting open educational practices that support student success. As the movement grows, Arkansas educators, librarians, and administrators are poised to leverage open resources to promote academic excellence throughout the state.

Christine Rickabaugh is the open education librarian at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas.



Participants from across Arkansas and beyond gathered for a full day of discussion and learning focused on open educational resources (OER). Photo by Brandon Cone, North Arkansas College.

Arkansas Librarians: Commission of Dreamers

by Noah Elrod

Faulkner-Van Buren Regional Library System

“What is a legacy? It’s planting seeds in a garden you’ll never get to see.”

-Hamilton: An American Musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda, 2015

Compiled in 1959, *Arkansas Librarians* was a labor of love by many across the state. Filled with biographies, photos, and well wishes toward their beloved Executive Librarian Mrs. Frances Neal, it is a testament to the exceptionalism of her leadership. After Mrs. Neal’s passing, the book was given back to its editor, Ms. Jackie Poe.

Jacqueline “Jackie” Poe

Arkansas Librarians would not have been possible without the work of Jackie Poe. A member of the Arkansas Library Commission (the Arkansas State Library’s predecessor) in 1959, Poe wrote the contributors to ask for a biography and photo. As

each response was returned, she organized them carefully by last name. This came as a relief to our current library staff as it made cataloging each librarian and their respective libraries much easier. Leave it to a librarian to ease the struggles of her future colleagues.

Jackie Poe was born in Conway to Huey and Nellie J. Poe in 1924. She and her younger sister, Avadene, were affectionately referred to as “Jack and Jill” by family and friends. One of her nephews, Clifford Harvey, said in 1959 that he would like to be a library worker just like his Aunt Jackie. Now a retired biologist living in California, Harvey still speaks fondly of his late aunt: “...I think [Jackie] was a groundbreaker in so many different ways that her story deserves to be remembered.”

In a scrapbook found in the Faulkner County Library storage cabinets, a luggage tag for Poe shows she resided at 66 Freeman Addition, Levy, North Little Rock at the time of the 1960 annual American Library Association (ALA) conference

trip to Montreal, Québec, Canada. When downtown Levy was subsequently demolished in 1962 to make way for the new I-40 roadway, her home was miraculously spared. It still stands today.

Outside of the library, Poe enjoyed outdoor activities and would take her nephews on hikes and fishing trips in the Central Arkansas area. “She was one of those people ... nobody else would be getting a bite, and she’d be catching fish,” recounts Harvey. Poe would often fish with her friends at local fishing holes. In 1953, she contributed to Volume XII of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, writing about the newly formed Lake Conway which provided ample fishing opportunities for local enthusiasts.

Though she never had children of her own, Poe was very active in helping care for others’ children. In addition to her nephews, she enjoyed working in her church’s nursery during her later years. “Jackie was everything I wanted to be when I grew up,” writes Holly Huckeba, who was still a young girl when she met Poe through church. “She was kind, thoughtful, adventurous, and wise.”

Speaking at her funeral service, Officiant Oran



From Arkansas Librarians. Top: Poe poses in front of the Southwest Arkansas Regional Library bookmobile. Bottom: An unknown person stands in the waves at the edge of a beach. Scrawled next to the photo in blue ballpoint pen, Poe states, “My first sight of the ocean, the Pacific.”

Burt honored Poe’s memory, saying, “Jackie herself was like a fine book, bound in genuine Morocco leather, hand sewn, embossed with gold, and printed on the finest leaf, in wide circulation, read and enjoyed by many, many people.” Jackie Poe’s name echoes through Arkansas history as a champion of librarianship and leadership. In her own words: “At the drop of a pastepot [librarians] can put on the coffeepot and plan anything from a Sterling donut to a seven course American Library Convention cross-country tour.”

Arkansas Library Commission

The Arkansas Library Commission was established by the Arkansas General Assembly in Act 139 of 1935. Funds for its operations were not appropriated until 1937. The Commission was authorized to provide guidance to the libraries across the state, to administer state aid to libraries, and to encourage the establishment of county libraries. Also part of the Commission’s work was training future librarians through their summer help program. “If possible, young people who have had the library science courses and who are interested in going on to library school are hired,” reads the back of a 1966 photo of 10 college students employed by the commission. Mary Ellen Curtis, a new summer employee, also worked at the Brown School Library at Washington University in St. Louis. Curtis later married Dr. Irving Louis Horowitz, a professor and sociologist, and both would go on to create the Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy in 1997.



Summer employees at the Arkansas Library Commission. Standing: Jenelle Erwin; Sally Sizer; Judy Harris; Eddie Buice; Diana Johnson; Mary Ellen Curtis. Seated: Mary Erwin; Sarah Covington; Wanda Rice; Carolyn Hearne.

(Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy, 2023)

Sisters Jenelle and Mary Erwin attended the same summer help program. Their father, County Judge Judson Erwin Jr., was known as a champion of libraries in local government. Jenelle's twin, Judson Erwin III, would go on to work as a librarian for the U.S. Army in Germany, South Korea, and Alaska.

Little Rock Librarians

Lifetime librarian Inez Shannon Bishop lent her skills to the Commission by organizing the Jefferson County Library, the first in Arkansas to be recognized by the ALA in 1925. In 1959, Bishop was a librarian at the White-Woodruff Regional Library.

Sisters Ayleen Ragland and Mary Elizabeth Urton were both members of the Commission; Ragland as the Sunnymede Elementary School principal in Fort Smith, and Urton as an employee of the Little Rock Public Library. "... When I discovered I was an oddity and would probably not be blessed with a family, I decided to go back into the business world. Besides, making beds and washing dishes is so UNSTIMULATING," recounted Urton. Writing her own biography in the form of a poem, Ragland stated: "*Summer work at the Commission / and trips by chartered bus / have made vacation days pass / with little wear or fuss*".

Other prominent Little Rock book-tenders of the time include Mary Coker and Lola Dunnivant, both librarians at Central High School when it desegregated in 1957. In her biography, Coker wrote,



Alex Wilson, Reporter from the Tri-State Defender, Memphis, Attacked by a Crowd, Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957, gelatin silver print, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, purchase with funds from Charlotte and Jim Dixon, 2007.66. © Will Counts (American, 1931-2001).

"Among my blessings, I count the fact that I have spent most of my life in Arkansas." She reported being an avid tropical fish enthusiast and lovingly mentioned her pet bettas.

It is important to remember that though our foremothers were pioneers of modern librarianship, they were not always the most reliable narrators. Though her *Arkansas Librarians* entry is short, we can see examples of Lola Dunnivant's character in her other writings. In diary entries submitted to the Arkansas State Archives, she boldly claimed about the infamous events of September 23, 1957, "... There was no real fighting. No one was injured beyond a few bruises." (Dunnivant, *Steel Helmets Under a September Sun*, 1989)

Today we know that is quite the claim – reporters such as Alex Wilson of the Memphis-based *Tri-State Defender* have stated otherwise. In an article written for publication days after the Nine were forced to leave school for a second time, Wilson wrote, "Yes, I was abused – a victim of misguided violence – but I am not bitter. If my effort to help bring human dignity in its fullest sense to the oppressed minority here is successful, then the welfare of all will be enhanced." (Alex Wilson on Covering Little Rock as a Black Journalist, 2025) In further diary entries, Dunnivant eventually shared her own ideals, stating: "I don't want integration." (Dunnivant, *Lola Dunnivant's Notes on the Integration Crisis*, 1959)

Arkansas Library Association Tours

The members of the Arkansas Library Association (ArLA) took many trips across the United States. Along with the 1960 trip to Montreal, members travelled to San Francisco and Washington D.C. for annual ALA conferences. These tours were organized by and for ArLA members, meaning each stop on the tour was specially planned for the furtherance of librarianship in Arkansas.

A photo from 1954 shows Commission librarians and trustees standing around a Trailways tour bus, dressed to the nines for an extensive tour of Southwest Arkansas libraries. During the 1960 tour, members stopped at Gaylord Bros., Inc., a book bindery in Syracuse, New York, to learn book care and repair directly from the source.

Though the national tours are no longer as robust as they once were, ArLA still holds an annual conference to share ideas and resources. Likewise, the Commission (now the Arkansas State Library) continues to offer professional development programs and courses. With the internet bridging gaps spanning continents and oceans, it is far easier to access the kind of resources and help that once would have taken a cross-country bus tour to find.

Frances Potter Neal

In correspondence while contributing to Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives on behalf of Mrs. Neal, Jackie Poe wrote that, "No one would have ever called Mrs. Neal 'Neal' to her face and [she couldn't] see doing it now." (Poe, Author Jackie Poe Biographical Entry (F. Neal), 1997)

Librarianship came naturally to Frances Neal. Married to Karl Neal, a cotton buyer, in 1931, she spent her life previous to her Commission work as an elementary educator. While she was a teacher in Warren, AR, she was among a group of colleagues and local organizations that aimed to open libraries in local schools. This would be the foundation of her legacy: bringing knowledge to rural areas of Arkansas. Her childhood home in Warren later became the location of the current Bradley County Library. (Frances Potter (1905-1990), 1990)

In the late 1940s, Mrs. Neal and her husband moved to Little Rock, where she would begin her work at the Arkansas Library Commission as a circulation librarian. Due to rural areas not yet having libraries, Mrs. Neal worked to share the good news of mail-order book borrowing. Families, churches, and other organizations could request



Frances Neal stands in front of bookshelves at the Arkansas Library Commission, State Library Commission, Little Rock, Ark. [Frances Potter Neal]. *"Books By Mail is Service of State Library Commission"*. Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas. Ernie Deane (American, 1911-1991)..

books from the Commission, and the books would be sent via mail to their respective borrowers. This program played a key role in obtaining votes for county-funded public libraries in the most hard-to-reach areas of Arkansas. (Williams, 2000)

Once she was appointed to the position of State Librarian of the Commission, Mrs. Neal continued her efforts to expand Arkansas libraries by using newly acquired federal funding to buy a bookmobile. The federal funding was provided by the Library Services Act, which provided aid for the development of public libraries in Arkansas. A designated librarian would take the bookmobile on a road trip to the less populated regions of the state. There, she would educate local communities and persuade county officials to support easier book-lending programs. In addition to broadening the physical reach of the State Library, Mrs. Neal helped to establish the Library for the Blind and Handicapped. This new library provided books in Braille and larger print for the visually impaired. (Williams, 2000)

Beloved amongst local authors, Mrs. Neal took special care to thank Arkansas poet Edsel Ford for his donation of his book, *Looking for Shiloh*, to the Commission. During a trip to the State Library in September 2025, I was able to locate this book, complete with a message and signature from Ford himself: "For all my friends at the Arkansas Library Commission, without whose commission I would not believe so strongly in mine." (Ford, 1968)

During her 27-year tenure as Arkansas' sixth State Librarian, Frances Potter Neal pioneered the bookmobile program, organized an annual book fair for the Commission, and began facilitating tours to libraries across the state and country. Mrs. Neal was heralded by her peers as an attentive, smart, and caring administrator; her dedication to expanding access and resources for rural libraries cemented her lasting legacy.

Provenance & Legacy

Jackie Poe spent her final years guarding an important piece of Arkansas history. Following her death in 2003, *Arkansas Librarians* was gifted to Ruth Voss at the Faulkner County Library. At some point in the last twenty years, it was moved to the storage cabinets in our Arkansas Room to gather dust and make friends with antique copies of the Arkansas Gazette. Once it was unearthed, it wasn't long before the book was digitized and donated to Hendrix Bailey Library's Special Collections. There, it will be properly stored and cared for with resources that our county-funded library system does not have access to.

Decades ago, our predecessors planted a garden; today, we harvest the fruit of their legacy in libraries all across the state. Along with the growth came unexpected challenges, but with the assistance from librarians of various backgrounds, solutions were readily available and implemented. Beulah Leftwich, a native of Fulton County who later settled in North Little Rock, wrote of her time at the Commission, "The work is so interesting, there is something new to be learned every day."

She's right. New ideas sprout each day; it is our duty to tend to them, and we do.

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Noah Elrod began working as a circulation clerk for Faulkner County Library in Conway in February 2024. Until 2019, he had lived and worked in Izard County. As a child Noah loved stories, but never dreamed he'd end up surrounded by so many. Noah is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to provide care and knowledge to the community he serves.

Texarkana Public Library Celebrates 100 Years

by *Olivia Poulton*

Director of the Texarkana Public Library

The Texarkana Public Library's Centennial Gala, held December 12 at the historic TRAHC building, was an unforgettable celebration of 100 years of service and community, with more than 100 guests in attendance. Library Director Olivia Poulton kicked off the evening with a warm welcome, thanking the Texarkana community for its continued support over the past century and

sharing well wishes for the next 100 years. Guests enjoyed a lively night featuring a silent auction with standout items from local businesses, including a weekend cabin getaway for 16, a helicopter ride, and signed Texas Rangers memorabilia. A stunning chocolate-dripped cake topped with a gleaming "100" highlighted the milestone, while a 360 photo booth and selfie station gave attendees fun mementos of the occasion. The celebration continued late into the night as the Michael Rhodes Jive Band entertained guests and kept the dance floor full.



Texarkana Public Library Director Olivia Poulton kicks off the festivities.



Texarkana Public Library celebrates 100 years.

Student Volunteering: A Library's Quest to Help Students

*by Jennifer Koenig Johnson
Springdale Public Library*

If you stay in librarianship long enough, it can be difficult to come up with new ideas, especially in terms of programming and volunteering. For many, it's not that we run out of creativity, it's that often we have already tried the idea. After 20 years working in libraries, I occasionally struggle with finding the next new idea.



Johnson

In 2022, I transitioned from being a reference librarian to the young adult librarian at the Springdale Public Library. I started working in reference services in 2005 as an undergraduate and after 15+ years, I was ready for a new challenge – YA. There is a lot that goes with my job that my title does not hint at, including the volunteer program for grades 8-12. Prior to the pandemic, my predecessor ran the program and, as a reference librarian, I rarely

knew the ins and outs of the program beyond the orientation training. When I started as the young adult librarian in January 2022, my primary goal was to restart the student volunteer program.

Like most libraries, the pandemic shut down services and kept us from doing the things we did prior to 2020. I knew the new volunteer program would need more structure and parameters in order to function with little staff interference. Before the pandemic, Kim Jones, reference librarian, remembers “teens’ interaction with staff was limited to basic



information like directives on assignments and requests for shelving carts or cleaning supplies.” It was also hard because not all staff knew their names, faces, and personalities. There was a lost opportunity for librarian-volunteer relationship building that could help them become future, responsible adults.

Before I restarted the volunteer program, it was important to have the right documentation. I updated the SPL Volunteer Handbook and networked with other librarians on their handbooks and volunteer forms. Some of the early applications, which were in paper format, asked them about how they found out about volunteering at the library, their skills, experiences, and hobbies, and why they wanted to volunteer at the library. Even then, it was important to me that they have ownership of their choice to volunteer and why. In 2023, the application became a digital form, and now it has transitioned into a registration form attached to a LibCal event. Besides having clear written parameters and expectations for volunteers in the application form, I made sure to save all submitted applications, created a master spreadsheet of all earned hours, and archived the pre-2022 files into an easy-to-navigate file structure.

Once the Student Volunteer Program restarted in March 2022, it ran well. Statistically, the student volunteer programs at the library increased by 49% in terms of volunteers and 61% in terms of hours

earned (2016-2019 compared to 2022-2025). There are several reasons for this increase:

- 1) Students need more hours (starting with the graduating class of 2027, all students will need 75 hours to graduate high school).
- 2) Post-pandemic young adults in Springdale and Northwest Arkansas seem more empathetic and want to help others.
- 3) While the Student Volunteer Program restarted in 2022, we did try other forms of volunteering – virtual (summer 2023 via Beanstack), participation in the Young Adult Student Society (2022-2024), outreach (incorporating volunteering into the session and having them completed an activity), and the Student Passive Volunteer Program (2023-present).
- 4) A more structured volunteer program gives young adults a job scenario where they earn volunteer hours instead of earning a paycheck and must be responsible and accountable while working on literacy and lifelong skills.

Volunteering at the library is a two-way street. The library benefits from volunteers helping with shelving, cleaning, straightening, etc., but the volunteer also gains experience, opportunities to work on literacy and life-long learning skills, and how to be accountable. Susan Hannan, circulation clerk, said before the pandemic, volunteers were “less worried about things [and] were silly and had lighter” outlooks. The pandemic had a significant impact on teens, and in the post-pandemic world, they need structure and want to feel they are making an impact on the library and the community.

To help with that, I have implemented various ways to reward the volunteers: earned-hours certificates, goody bags in December, May and July, and poster board displays of their yearly goals and why volunteering is important. It’s vital that they see and hear how much the library appreciates them. We try to have an art display once a year so that



the community can appreciate the creativity of our volunteers, and to provide seniors with a capstone activity. The senior project is where 12th grade volunteers are allowed to do something for the library that will then be on display for others to see. It's an excellent opportunity for us to prepare volunteers for adulthood while also letting them leave a legacy. Many volunteers start off as quiet, nervous, or scared, so it's encouraging to celebrate their growth in social and communication skills at the end of their tenure.

The library offers multiple ways to volunteer. The Student Volunteer Program is for grades 8-12. If they are 13 or 14, they do need to have a parent or guardian in the library (per library policy). I accept applications to volunteer in May (for summer), August (for fall), and December (for spring). The program allows for 50 volunteers (a maximum I had to set after having almost 75 volunteers in fall 2022).

Another way to volunteer is through the Student Passive Volunteer Program for grades 6-12. This consists of a monthly sign up for a take home activity kit. Each month, the kit contains an activity that the volunteer must complete, with their name on the bag, and return to the library by the end of the month. Each returned, completed kit earns three hours. This program allows for 50 volunteers (due to the cost of supplies). Kits have included gratitude cards, holiday cards, bookmarks, no-sew blankets and dog toys (for the animal shelter), pet food donation drive, art supplies (and/or a letter on why volunteering is important) for Arkansas Children's Hospital, and park trash pickup (with parental supervision). Students have also earned volunteer hours when I do school outreach and/or library tours, as I have the students make gratitude cards for teachers, participate in a discussion about volunteering, or make decorations for the library's volunteer program.

Volunteer training is required for all volunteers for the summer but orientation for fall and spring is reserved for only the new volunteers and the returning volunteers who need a refresher. Traditionally, seasoned volunteers (usually 11th or 12th graders) will train new volunteers (with my supervision) so that they can practice communication, leadership, and instruction. I have found peer to peer volunteering works well. Each volunteer has a nametag that looks like staff nametags, and an assignment duty slip is included in each nametag. Below is an example of an assignment

duty slip.

Saturday
Straighten the Shelves in the YA Manga, Graphic Novels, & New Materials Collections
Clean the Covers of the Children's Readers letters D - F (get the container of pink cleaner & a towel); Clean the Covers of the Children's Picture Books in the New Materials Bins (get the container of pink cleaner & a towel)
Clean the Shelves in the Adult Fiction Collection numbers letters A - K (get the cleaning bucket)
Shelve Materials

I make sure that those volunteering in the library meet staff as we practice asking for a shelving cart, cleaning supplies, etc. Most staff also introduce themselves and try to get to know the volunteers. I emphasize that the volunteers are part of the library, and we care about their wellbeing when they are volunteering.

With students needing volunteer hours to graduate, I am always looking for other ways the library can award hours. Starting in January, we will have a bi-monthly program, Purposeful Crafting, where those who attend will make items that will be donated to local nonprofit organizations. Our first project will be crocheting hats for local shelters. This would provide the opportunity for more students to earn up to four hours of volunteer time per month.

Libraries can provide volunteering in a variety of ways – informational programming where they learn a skill (that they might use later to help the community), peer-to-peer programming, school visits, library tours, in-person volunteering, virtual volunteering, and passive kit volunteering. I believe this can apply for most teens – teens need more volunteering opportunities due to “an increase in the required number of community service hours, the dedication of staff, and [the] limitations teens face in the job market.” For those who are not sure how to start this process, or even how to talk to teens, I recommend simply go to where they are in the library with a coloring sheet and markers and see who wants to color. From there, you can talk to them, ask them questions, and possibly get some feedback on what teens need from the library.

Jennifer Johnson is the young adult librarian at the Springdale Public Library in Springdale, Arkansas and can be reached at jjohnson@springdalelibrary.com.

AROUND ARKANSAS:

by Heather Hays, Associate Editor

Congratulations to our own Treasurer-elect, Clare Graham, winner of this year's Scholastic Library Publishing Award. You can find more information on the 2025 ALA Award Winners website.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released its report on the condition of public library facilities in the U.S., finding that a majority of facilities are in bad shape, with 70% having a backlog of deferred maintenance. This report was mandated by Congress in 2024 and is available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-107262>.

A newsletter from "The Justice Report" (Arkansas Access to Justice) reported, "We are proud to announce this year's honorees for the Access to Justice Awards, a celebration of the outstanding individuals and organizations working to expand access to justice across Arkansas. One honoree is Shannon Rodriguez, whose work at the Monticello Branch Library has brought free legal clinics and kiosks to Southeast Arkansas."

"The Librarians" movie won the Audience Choice Award at the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. Way to go!

The Intellectual Freedom committee announced the Intellectual Freedom Helpline, a new resource for librarians dealing with censorship in Arkansas. Report any materials, programs, topics, etc. that are challenged in your library using the form, and you'll be connected with support. Trained helpline volunteers will be available to share resources, lend a listening ear, and provide help with what to do next. No legal advice will be given, but legal referrals may be made. All support requests are confidential, and reports can be made anonymously. Find a link to the form and more information at https://www.arighttoread.org/arkansas_intellectual_freedom_helpline.

The Rockefeller Institute issued a challenge to all Arkansans:

1. Read at least two titles from the Democracy Reading Challenge list at [https://rockefellerinstitute.org/blog/2025-democracy-](https://rockefellerinstitute.org/blog/2025-democracy-reading-challenge/)

[reading-challenge/](#)

2. Perform one civic action in your community
In 2025, state and federal elected officials picked the titles for the list. This year, they're asking for input from library professionals around the state as part of their broader Civic Arkansas program.

Civic Arkansas is the Institute's initiative to improve our state's civic health by leveraging a network of civic organizations across the Natural State and empowering communities to practice collaborative problem solving at the local level.

This past fall we learned the sad news that long-time Arkansas State Library employee, Sally Hawkes, passed away on September 22, 2025. She lived in seven states before moving to Little Rock in the mid-1980s, worked at the Arkansas State Library from the time she came to Little Rock until she retired in 2017. She was a published author and a member of Novelist's, Inc. Sally was a longtime member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church and was very active in a variety of ministries there.



Hawkes

A reminder to Arkansas librarians: please submit news items to me for the next *Arkansas Libraries* issue! Births, deaths, new hires, retirements, funding, new buildings, and news that affects Arkansas libraries would be perfect fits for this column. Just jot me an email at hhays@bentonville.com, and you'll most likely see it published in our journal.

Heather Hays is senior librarian at the Bentonville Public Library.



Holiday book tree at Fayetteville Public Library.

Fall Semester Activities at SouthArk

by *Lauri Wilson*

South Arkansas College

We've had a busy fall semester and hosted several activities that were moved inside because of bad weather. In September our Fall Fest drew a big crowd of students for games, pumpkin painting and everyone's favorite – karaoke! Some of our Stars are real rock stars! The chili cook-off kept everyone warm and ready for a full day of activities.

In December we did all the painting for our

Christmas parade float inside the library, once again due to a week of rainy, cold weather. It was a fun group of student, staff, and community volunteers who brought a real holiday spirit as they worked till the last-minute painting, decorating and assembling the float. We're proud to say that we won first prize in the large float division.

Lauri Wilson is library technician at South Arkansas College's Mahony Family Library in El Dorado, Arkansas.



Float preparation.



Fall fest pumpkin painting.

Arkansas Library Association
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Eureka Springs Carnegie Library in the snow..

Arkansas Libraries
ISSN 0004-184X