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## Volume 23 Issue 3 Introduction

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# From the Guest Editor



OLA PRESIDENT, BUZZY NIELSEN

Buzzy is a rural boy with a smattering of big city sensibilities. In his 22 years as a librarian, he has worked in libraries of all types and sizes. His heart remains with rural libraries, however, which is why he currently directs the Crook County Library in Prineville. Buzzy is a self-professed policy wonk and currently serves as OLA President.

The Oregon library community consistently amazes me with its innovative, enterprising, and patron-focused activities. Indeed, we hear about these many activities through Libs-Or, OLA conferences, and this journal. While certainly not by design, many of the voices we hear come from libraries along the I-5 corridor. Cool things happen in those libraries, of course, but this issue of the *OLA Quarterly* amplifies voices we hear less frequently: the rural institutions that constitute the majority of the libraries in Oregon.

I have spent most of my career working in small and rural libraries. My first library job was at my hometown library: Langlois Public Library (service population: 785) on the southern Oregon coast. The experiences I had at Langlois and other rural Oregon libraries taught me two lessons that, while perhaps truisms, are nonetheless worth saying. First, serving patrons in rural areas—no matter your library type—bears similarity to larger library counterparts, but it differs in significant ways that require a shift in mindset. Second, “rural” is not some monolithic concept that comes with a defined set of needs, just as “urban” and “suburban” are not; each rural community and group of patrons is unique.

There are so many aspects of rural librarianship that set it apart from working in larger libraries. Sometimes those differences seem small. For instance, try shopping for groceries without running into a patron. Sometimes the differences are more significant. A single person could be the cataloging, finance, adult services, and maintenance “departments” all rolled into one! In addition to fostering a problem-solving attitude, working in a rural library instills in you an important lesson for all libraries: you don’t merely serve the community, you are the community, just like your patrons.

Each rural community is as distinctive as the individuals who comprise it. Thinking of my own work, I have seen that diversity: the rainy logging and ranching communities of southern Oregon; the blended culture of immigrants, retirees, farmers, and techies in the Gorge; and, in my current job, the wild west of the frontier meeting the wild west of the Internet in the Oregon high desert. The libraries in these communities look different because the people they serve are different.

In the following pages, you’ll get to hear the voices of these diverse communities literally from across the state, from Gold Beach on the south coast to Joseph in the northeast. We start with Jeremy Skinner from Curry Public Library in Gold Beach, who tells us his own story of local boy made good and how returning to run his hometown library influenced how he sees library services. From a librarian story to patrons’ stories, Maureen Flanagan Battistella



Photo by Kathleen Kiefer.

of Southern Oregon University and Charlene Prinsen and Thalia Truesdell of the Eagle Point and Ruch branches of Jackson County Library District tell us of their partnership to preserve the stories of the “old-timers” in their towns. The diversity of Oregon is on display in Sue Ludington’s article about how different rural county governments approach delivering law library services, informed by Sue’s own perspective working at the Washington County Law Library.

Then, from the “dry side,” as we like to call it, come three stories of success from grant-funded projects. Agriculture,

arts, and libraries meet in Brian Vegter’s account of Libraries of Eastern Oregon’s ArtPlace America project, demonstrating the beauty that can arise from bringing disparate people together. Jennifer Costley of Pendleton Public Library writes about the success of northeast Oregon libraries’ Ready2Learn program, which sent librarians out to ensure that children in five rural Oregon counties were ready for kindergarten. At the other end of a student’s path, we hear about a partnership between Jacquelyn Ray of Blue Mountain Community College and Delia Fields of Hermiston High School to teach their students the important information literacy skills they need for college and life. Rounding out the issue is a history lesson from Rich Wandschneider of the Alvin M. and Betty Josephy Library of Western History and Culture in Joseph. The Josephy Library’s unique collection documents the history and culture of the Nez Perce and their continuing influence on the region.

These stories represent a small fraction of the incredible stories happening in rural libraries across Oregon. I hope that this issue will encourage more of our smaller-library colleagues to tell their stories in future issues of the *OLA Quarterly*, at conferences, in conversations, and anywhere they can. Further, to those of you working in larger libraries in the urban and suburban parts of the state, we love you, too, and I hope that some of these stories inspire you to try something new at your library. Thank you so much to the authors who contributed to this issue and the crack team of *OLAQ* editors; you all do truly incredible things.

—BUZZY NIELSEN  
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