

I Love My Librarian!
2009 Award

Nominations for Laura Grunweg

Director of Youth and Young Adult Services
River Edge Public Library
River Edge, New Jersey

Nominator:
Joseph Amapani
River Edge, New Jersey

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known her for 3 years; by bringing my 3-year-old son to the library

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

By giving my son a safe learning place and helping to acclimate him to the library; showing my child nothing but kindness, love, and support (and hugs); introduced him to all the extra programs at the library

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

Introduced me to a local computer teacher that was able to give me one-on-one lessons in my home (she knew him, she knew of my need, and she put us together)

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

She is always there for us; if she knows there's a storytime coming up, she'll make sure my son gets in (even if he's underage);

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

Made us feel warm, welcome, and a part of the community; asked for our help in advocating for improved library service in town and gave me an opportunity to be a voice in my town

Nominator:
Charles Kee
River Edge, New Jersey

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Ms. Grunberg for almost 10 years. She runs wonderful children's programs that my children have participated in.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

In addition to her outstanding children's programs, Ms. Grunberg has always been very attentive my children's and own research needs. She definitely has made both my young children's learning experience more interesting and exciting.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

The library has made a great amount of information available to enhance my families knowledge through books, dvds, cds, audio books and other programs. Ms. Grunberg's has improved the quality of life for my entire family through the programs she runs and the research help she offers.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Ms. Grunberg is always energetic. Her great attitude to learning and life inspires all that are in contact with her.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

Ms. Grunberg's innovative children's and adult programs are well known in the community. She is well known and admired for these contributions in our community.

Nominator:
Mary Lennox
River Edge, New Jersey

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Laura for four years. She was hired as the Director of Youth Services at the River Edge Library where I have been employed for the past 22 years.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

I asked Laura for help in finding venues where I could locate a specific vintage book. She was tireless in her pursuit of these Web sites and would not give up until she had succeeded. She lives by a wooden sign displayed on her desk: "Expect a Miracle" and she delivers on it every day. She's edited and retyped resumes for anxious job seekers, retouched photos using her own laptop and Photoshop software, and patiently showed students how to dress up their school reports using Word and Publisher.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

One very important way Laura has improved the quality of my library life is in her expertise with computers. The Technical Services department secured a new computer program for spine labeling which Laura was instrumental in setting up and has patiently instructed me and my coworkers in its use. She even tweaked the program to make it easier to use and understand.

She tries with grace, tact, and humor to mitigate staff disputes bringing them to the director's attention and working to resolve them in staff meetings.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Laura's unique personality brings an atmosphere of fun to the library. She came into a "family" of thirteen women and unsuccessfully attempted to get us to dress for Halloween even though she supplied all the apparel. Undeterred, she continued to change characters throughout the day -- and I know I couldn't wait to see what she'd be next. When you spot a subtle sign like "Many Happy" attached over the book drop "Returns" slot, you just know it's Laura's handiwork.

She is dedicated to the library (both its patrons and staff) and is not a nine-to-fiver. Her hours are what is needed to get the job done. She is a tireless, hands-on worker, opening up the computers in the morning, attending to clogged

bathroom plumbing, protecting injured birds found on the property, and showing concern and care for everyone -- staff and patrons alike.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

On her lunch hour, she drove an elderly woman to the doctor after she'd fallen and was bleeding on the walkway outside -- then walked the mile back to the library after bringing the woman home. In fact, she seldom takes a full lunch, preferring to be at her desk in case she's needed. She never turns down an opportunity to help community organizations -- judging the Girl Scouts scarecrow contest each fall, presenting a program on the origin of the alphabet to boy scouts, instructing eight classes in two different schools (in one week) on use of the library catalog, conducting special storytimes for autistic kids, and twice performed her "Pretty Bad Puppet Theatre" show at the local Barnes & Noble bookstore to raise funds for The Friends of the Library. She used her design skills (she is a professional graphic designer) to create a special patron's pets calendar which became the biggest Friends' fundraiser of all time.

Nominator:

Jane Steuerwald
Glen Rock, New Jersey

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Laura for more than 20 years. I first came to know her when I served as the chairperson of the Media Arts Department at New Jersey City University from 1986 to 2002. In 1994, I had the opportunity to recruit faculty for our new program in computer graphics and I hired her as the program coordinator.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

Laura has helped me at the River Edge Library in numerous ways. She has helped me to locate many texts, which I need for curriculum development, and has also helped me locate films (DVD's) that I need to screen and research for my course work at New Jersey City University. In a totally different vein, I am an avid reader and Laura has recommended books too numerous to mention, that I have enjoyed immensely for the pure love of reading. Although I am not a resident of River Edge, I am a member of the Bergen County library system and have access to the River Edge Library. Because Laura Grunberg is such a highly trained and accessible professional, I go out of my way to patronize River Edge.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

Having Laura Grunberg as a resource person at the River Edge Library has improved the quality of my work life and my reading for pleasure life enormously. I am grateful to her for assisting me on so many levels.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

She is helpful, cheerful, and is an outstanding problem solver. If she doesn't immediately know the answer to something, she will look further into the question and come up with a variety of solutions. She also involves the River Edge community in many wonderful projects. This past year she created an absolutely awesome calendar to use as a library fundraiser, which incorporated photographs of patrons' pets into whimsical landscapes for each month. The calendars sold out immediately with people clamoring for more. I had the chance to observe Laura working on this project from time to time and the effort, artistic talent, imagination, and dedication she put into it was nothing short of amazing.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

Laura creates special programs for children including “theme” story times, which are so popular in the community of River Edge that patrons sign up weeks in advance. She never fails to publicize events in local newspapers, the library Web site, and through flyers, allowing all residents of River Edge and the surrounding communities to participate in the wonderful events she designs and coordinates. She assists patrons who need help navigating computer technology; she brings dynamic programs to the library including lectures, musical performances, art exhibitions, and so much more. She is a valuable gem and an enormous asset to the library and community of River Edge.

Nominator:
Barry Koch
South Nyack, New York

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Laura Grunberg for twenty years, and have been fortunate to call her a good friend. I met her when she was the art director of an "English as a Second Language" grade school publisher and I was a freelance illustrator, illuminating teaching programs that her company produced. What differentiated Laura from others I worked with was a deep seated interest in expanding the reach of the material her company offered, an exploratory nature that refused to rest on tradition for its own sake, and a singular humor that made for a "fun kind of learning". Over the intervening years, as her pursuit of and concern with educating has led her into the public library arena, I have observed how Laura's enthusiasm for "sluicing out" and sharing knowledge has benefited friends and library patrons alike.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

I can truthfully say that Laura Grunberg has been the main link to libraries for me since the late 1980s. She has expanded my understanding of what a library does, and has constantly endeavored to augment its usefulness in the community. As Director of Children's Services, she has continually brought bright, creative ideas to the responsibility of producing and promoting reading programs at her library in ways that have involved me personally.

For example, Laura knew that I owned a compact collector car (whimsically called a "Goggomobile"... she likes "whimsical"!), and prevailed upon me to lend it to the library to promote their Summer Reading Club. We rolled the vehicle into a " Road Trip Vacation" setting she devised and produced by herself (placed opposite the library's circulation desk) featuring a many layered road sign pointing to such places as "Booklyn," "Peruse," and "Reado di Janeiro," and invited children to guess the number of books she had piled inside it to win a prize at the end of the program's run. I thought it a great substitution: books for the traditional jelly beans... literature as candy!

In another instance, Laura caught wind of a short run of "Seussical the Musical" in a local theatre twenty miles away from her library, and convinced the theatre company to let her reuse the scenery instead of throwing it away, rented a truck to move it at her own expense, and mounted it as a backdrop to enhance the existing lackluster decor of the Children's Room at her library.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

The details of educating matter a lot to Laura. Over the years, she has dragged me (willingly) on field trips to visit every library within 100 miles of where she works, on what could be called "info safaris", during which she observes layout, staffing, and procedural guidelines, utilizing that which she can to incrementally improve the experience at her own location. I have enjoyed these road trips immensely, and they have, despite a native stubborn immobility, enriched my life experience. (With the knowledge gained during these adventures, she was able to offer useful suggestions to the interior design company that was hired to rework the River Edge, New Jersey Library, giving them bits they could use to produce an improved feng shui for better flow of traffic... and ideas. She even took the floor plan they developed and revised it based on her knowledge of user experiences and information seeking behavior.)

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Laura goes beyond the traditional boundaries of lending books as the primary job of a librarian; she sees her job as helping people get information in any way possible and for any possible use. Her attitude is that no knowledge sought is trivial, no service too involved that can help people get what they need. I have observed her writing and producing resumes for job seekers. She has helped elderly people through the confusion of becoming computer-savvy (even helped an older gent edit his poetry). She spends her own money to gather a large menagerie of puppets and props that she uses for shows for children, which she writes, produces and in which she acts every part. From her years in publishing, she has bartered her considerable skills as a graphic designer and copy writer to garner educational entertainment.

For example, in order to procure a regionally recognized act at a lower rate, she designed an inventive poster into which the entertainer could plug gig info and reuse for future shows. She spent months designing a CD and jacket package for a singing act so the library could procure just one show at a lower price. Then she repeated the deal a year later for a second show.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

I believe that Laura's tireless efforts towards education through the medium of the library has enriched the landscape of River Edge, and kept the library relevant in a time of diminished expectations. A recent pledge drive for library renovation and expansion utilized a "get me out of jail" program. Laura arranged for photography of local notables whom she cajoled into participating (snapping the portraits herself) and produced a lively and humorous flyer with a ransom

note theme (did I mention that Laura is the funniest person I know?) which ensured the success of the program.

Currently, Laura is designing the mailer for the second stage of the drive. In her typical fashion, she took the raw ideas offered by the "Friends" of the library and dove deeply into reference books and the net to learn the principals of fundraising in terms of producing the most effective printed program. She was able to educate the Board with these guidelines, getting clearance to rework the thrust of the flyer for a more likely success.

Laura is truly fearless; a real Renaissance woman who knows no limitations, and the public – her “peeps” as she calls them – absolutely adore her for it.

Nominator:
JoAnn Healey
Oradell, New Jersey

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Laura for almost five years. I am a young adult assistant in a neighboring community. We collaborate on our summer reading club book discussion groups for middle and high school students. Our towns share a regional school district.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

While our library was being renovated Laura offered us River Edge's community room. She prepared the room and created the promotional materials, book marks etc for over 100 teens. This is our fourth year of our highly successful program, due in a large part to Laura's tireless commitment and great spirit.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

Laura has been extremely supportive of our library and the possibility of collaboration. When our children's librarian Debby Kyritz passed away Laura stepped in and helped us prepare programs and book orders. She gave graciously of her time to assist our new librarian to acclimate to a new library setting.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

She is a lot of fun. The kids love her. She sings dances and plays guitar when doing story hours. Her desk is always decorated for whatever holiday is approaching.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

She never turns down the opportunity when a community organization comes calling for assistance. Every Halloween she judges the scarecrow contest in the park, she has performed at a local book store on numerous occasions to raise money for the Friends of the Library. Four or five times a year she tells stories, sings and plays guitar at the local preschool and also for groups of autistic children who visit the library. She also goes to the elementary schools to teach library catalog usage.

Nominator:
Mary Anne Guiliano
River Edge, New Jersey

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Laura Grunberg for about 3 years when she was hired to fill the position of the Director of Children's Services at the River Edge Public Library, where I work as her assistant. I have been employed in the capacity for 12 years.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one. For instance, did the nominee inspire in you a love for literature; assist you in a research project or finding other information?

Although Laura is a Children's Librarian, I have witnessed countless times her efforts to help library patrons of all ages, particularly the very young and the elderly. I don't believe the words "no" or "can't help you" are in her vocabulary. She is tenacious in finding information when presented with a difficult reference question. Laura is very patient and conducts in-depth reference interviews until she understands what the patron needs. I have known of several individuals who have gotten hired with resumes that she has assisted researching and composing. On a personal level, I am currently working toward my own MLS online after being out of school for many years. Laura has helped me learn to navigate the online learning world and has assisted me in researching and proofreading my term papers.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

The library and Laura have improved my quality of life by making me confident I will be welcomed in finding the information help I need in a friendly and professional manner. Laura has been a good role model particularly in her approach to going out of her way to be of service to all patrons.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Laura has made the library a very welcome place for our young patrons. She has purchased cozy furniture for families to sit and read together in the Children's area. There are educational toys and art supplies present for the children's use. Laura works very hard at and is very talented in presenting innovative storytimes for the very young patrons. Her programs are creative and children and parents are loyal in attending and highly praise her presentations. In addition, Laura has weeded many of the children's and young adult books that were outdated and in bad condition with some outstanding selections that have resulted in a fresh and current collection. Laura is usually the first one in and last one to leave work at the end of the day.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

Laura has made a difference in River Edge in the programs she has presented to the children in our community. Be it the summer reading club, storytimes at the local daycare center and for a special needs class, scout tours of the library, or fundraising programs for the library at Barnes and Noble, Laura gives 100% all the time.