



I Love My
Librarian!
2015 Award

**Nominee: April Roy
Lucile H. Bluford Branch
Kansas City, Missouri**

Nominator: Christine Taylor

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award.

April Roy is special. She was named manager of a library in a high poverty, high crime district. Yet in her first few years she's grown a devoted patronage and the library buzzes with positive energy by establishing the site as a community center emphasizing literacy, health and wellness.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience.

I grew up in inner city Cleveland. As a child with limited resources I made the local library my home base. That tradition - library as my life blood - has continued into my adulthood and it is also one I have instilled in my children and their friends. April is always willing to locate resources when I need them, or point me in the right direction. For lack of a better word, she's my "go to" for all things literature. She exudes the type of joy that makes visiting a pleasure. But what sticks out the most, is that it is clear she really likes the people she serves. For our community, acceptance and feeling invited are keys to getting people to adopt a facility as a place to gather. Plus, she's full of surprises.

I discuss April's "huge" literature surprise for me and for the community later in this application.

3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.

Prior to this assignment, April had been the children's librarian at a popular new facility near an upscale shopping district. That library also attracted a number of wealthy suburban patrons and was host to city-wide programs including those by nationally known authors.

When April transferred to the Bluford,branch it was in an area that had yet to experience the renaissance afforded to communities on the western edge of Kansas City and can best be described as "left behind." The community receives little or no investment from the Tax Increment Financing initiatives which fund initiatives in the other parts of the city. In

fact, the TIF structure which eliminates local property taxes for new companies moving into the area, or renovating properties downtown have eroded funding for the public library system in general.

Once April transferred to Bluford, the library blossomed. Where I used to walk into a mostly unused space, the library now buzzes with activity. There is a post office supply station for patrons. She distributes, on average, 800 donated books to children each month through community events and festivals. Books are also stocked in the waiting rooms of the Sam Rodgers Health Center. One month the total reached 1,900 books put in the hands of readers. For adults and children, Bluford has become the place for homework help, job search assistance, refuge or to find a passion for reading. She knows many of the visitors by name, and they've responded by putting out the word that Bluford is a place where people can feel welcome.

One of April's standout activities is her health and fitness initiatives. Obesity and diabetes is a problem in our community. April began hosting free exercise classes, including a "Chair fitness" class for older clients. As the popularity of the programs grew, April rolled up her sleeves and began seeking out grants to build library programs for her branch. Her first grant of \$5,000 pays for a chair fitness class and a walking program started the previous fall. She met with resistance from funders who didn't believe the library was an appropriate place for health and wellness. Undeterred, she continued to seek out funding. This summer she received an additional \$10,000 to fund fitness and weight loss challenges for the remainder of the year. She offers four kick-boxing and cardio classes each week totaling almost 200 people. Hosted sessions on healthy eating that included an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables for those who attended. She also offers a couple's fitness class each month.

Now the public is taking notice of April's efforts and her branch has been featured in the news. Most recently, a local television reporter, Cynthia Newsome attended a class and reported on her positive experience.

April's children's programming should also be commended. This spring she hosted Super Hero Training camp where children could arrive in costume, make crafts to keep and "practice feats of strength, agility and bravery. Children receive an official Superhero certificate at the conclusion. She's also hosted presentations from the zoo, dance presentations, puppet shows and more.

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

I am a huge fan of science fiction and fantasy. Recently I was invited to help April recruit an audience for a top secret workshop with an author/editor. For recruitment purposes - emphasis on people from the surrounding community. The catch? Tickets were free, but the guests had to agree to come without knowing who they were going to see. Attendance for adults was limited because of the one hundred spots available, she had reserved half for local high school students in a creative writing program. Food and a book were also provided.

Imagine the hush that fell over the audience when a limousine pulled up and George RR Martin, author of A Song of Ice and Fire (also known as Game of Thrones) walked into the library. Bluford patrons were allowed to ask questions, have their pictures taken with him, and were treated to a reading from the unpublished next installment of the series. Even the local press was not allowed to know the name of the speaker until they arrived

at the event. April had worked with a local conference organizer to secure the guest at no cost. And had pulled off the biggest surprise of the season. The session was so successful that local organizers are working with her to make this an annual event. Needless to say I was thrilled, and attendees are anxiously anticipating next year's "surprise" guest.

Also, I have been struggling with weight most of my adult life. April has gently prodded me to investigate the classes and pointed out that she, herself, had been using the programs in her own life. She routinely shares her journey, including tapes of her exercising with the fitness instructor, to show she is following the same path. She's lost eighty pounds.

I attended "Chair fitness" because I thought I wasn't quite physically fit enough to do the kick-boxing classes. The library opens an hour early for the session. I found myself surrounded by patrons many years my senior but discovered I was struggling to keep up with them. They'd improved their fitness level by regularly attending the class and began coaching me. So I'm toning, and catching up. The women instantly embraced me and everyone - even those like me who were new - were made to feel like part of the family. I've lost ten pounds and counting.

So that "little girl" who grew up in Cleveland libraries is now a grown adult with girls of her own who found a home at a Kansas City library branch.

5. How does the nominee make the library a better place?

I've always tried to teach my children that the ultimate goal in life is to find a profession for which you have passion and that brings you joy. That a life time is too long to be a job you don't love. I often use April as an example and my children knew they could seek her out when they were younger and became old enough to visit the library on their own. It is very clear, both from her work in the library, and her community work outside of it, that April was born for this job. It requires diplomacy, good people skills, a little ingenuity in the face of falling budgets, and a huge vision that life can be better than it is. But more importantly, April "walks" her talk both in promoting literacy, and in her health and wellness programs.

What used to be an underutilized facility is now brimming with life. On a recent visit every table was full, and every computer occupied. And nearby, a film crew had arrived to shoot videos of patrons for a series on PBS about libraries.

I would invite you to Kansas City to see what "gold" April has spun from the limited resources she was given to work with when she first arrived. She turned the Bluford library into an oasis for a community that has little else to claim as its own.