

I Love My Librarian!

2017 Award

Annie Cipolla

Los Angeles Public Library – Palisades
Pacific Palisades, California

Nominator: Susan Treadwell

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets them apart?

Annie Cipolla, the Young Adult Librarian at the Pacific Palisades branch of the Los Angeles Public Library, possesses all the qualities of an ideal librarian, including a deep mastery of her profession along with a dynamic, forward-thinking ability to lead. Before her arrival, the Pacific Palisades Library was simply a place to check out books. Now it feels like the beating heart of our community.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you 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 project or finding other information?

The Pacific Palisades Library is located in the Pacific Palisades, a well-to-do community in Los Angeles. But with Annie's leadership, it serves the needs of local residents in addition to patrons from the greater Los Angeles area. She specifically serves the 2,800 economically and socially diverse students who travel from over 100 zip codes throughout the city to attend the local public high school, Palisades Charter High. To provide some perspective, a significant number of these students spend an average of four hours a day on their round-trip commute.

Annie's personal story, which she recounts beautifully in a TEDx Talk produced by students from her Teen Council program, (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOoeXoP0N6U), motivates her to reach out to all students of every economic status and background. She is on a mission to equalize the playing field for all by providing resources they need to be college and career-ready.

My family has personally benefited from her programs in exceptional ways. For example, we attended workshops and seminars that taught us how to successfully navigate the college admission process. She hosted a University of Chicago admissions representative who took us through the process, point-by-point, so that we understood what colleges look for in an application, and how to fulfill those expectations. A U.S.C. financial aid officer provided outstanding information about how to access aid, and how to further research the subject by utilizing library resources. A top college advisor, Dr. Rebecca

Josephs, continually offers workshops at the library because she is so committed to Annie's vision of providing under-served students with the same information and resources that privileged students can access.

My son, a college sophomore, first met Annie while looking to fulfill required community service hours for high school. Like so many teens, he had a lot of interests, but didn't have a particular focus. Under Annie's supervision at the library, he performed routine services as a volunteer, such as re-stacking books. But once he started attending her monthly teen meetings, his world came into focus. He met students from across Los Angeles. One student in particular had a vision: to produce an officially licensed TEDx Talk. That year, three motivated teenagers, including my son, persevered through endless obstacles and challenges to create an event that was creative, smart and engaged the community. The TEDx Talk, entitled "Opening Your Eyes," was presented to a sold-out audience who were inspired by the spirit and intelligence of teenagers who had come together to make something of value. The following year, my son produced another TEDx event at Palisades High, entitled "Sparking Creativity." Annie, along with a diverse group of speakers, gave a talk that was personal and motivating. She told her life story, and concluded by emphasizing the positive role the library can play in students' lives – real services that can have a direct impact on their futures.

Annie was also instrumental in helping my son access two (paid) summer internship opportunities. She sent him the applications for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the Southern California Association of Governments, because she personally knew of his interest in government. And because he was an on-going volunteer at the library, she could provide a recommendation and vouch for his strong work ethic. Both internships, which provided him with outstanding, real-world experience, undoubtedly contributed to his acceptance to his top-choice university. This is every parent's hope – that their children will discover their talents and abilities, and develop them in a college that truly fits their academic and professional goals. Annie's knowledge of the library's resources, as well as her first-rate programming, enabled our son to find his way while attending a public school in Los Angeles -- the country's second-largest city that, unfortunately, can be utterly indifferent to the success of its youth.

Many parents relate similar stories of accomplishment regarding their teenagers. One young man, who is shy, got involved with the teen programs and activities. Annie reached out to him, and he became a volunteer at the library. His mother reports that he developed a "real sense of purpose" and eventually, accepted a job at the local newspaper. Again, Annie got to know the student as a person, and was able to help connect him to a field that interested him. And next month, another teen has scheduled a three-part Screenwriting Workshop for the library. The sense of opportunity that she creates knows no bounds.

Annie's programs, workshops and seminars continue to attract sizable numbers of community members. Honestly, there are too many to mention here. The fact is, if there is a program you would like to see developed, she will do everything in her power to

make it happen. And because she is a professional in every sense of the word, it will be first-rate. Her community has come to expect nothing less.

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

The programs and events Annie initiates and implements target a cross-generational audience. Her extensive programming for young adults, their parents and the wider Los Angeles community has strengthened the fiber of our citizenry. As library patrons, we're getting in touch with our civic responsibilities.

Annie took on a very complex and time-consuming project this past summer. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce runs a program called LA Youth at Work. Their goal is to employ 2,000 teens in summer jobs. But the Chamber needed more facilitators and venues to run the required job-training and work-readiness workshops. Annie received the necessary training to become a facilitator, and reached out to her community for further support. Two members of her monthly Empty Nester Support Group took the training and became facilitators, as well. The workshops, held at the Pacific Palisades branch, covered resume writing, cover letters, personal branding, social media, mock interviewing and rules for filling out job applications. Youth from across Los Angeles attended these workshops. The young participants were eager to learn how to successfully navigate the path to employment. (These skills are not taught in most Los Angeles public schools, so the library is truly responding to a critical need.)

The economically and socially diverse group of young people who came together at the library to attend the job workshops found common ground. The group was energetic, and yes, nervous, too, because many of them are under pressure to earn money to help support their families. They were all motivated to learn the essentials of job readiness. One of the best outcomes was the high number of youth who signed up for library cards – for the very first time! It made sense because the facilitators recommended books that supplemented the information students had just learned. Bingo! That's how you meet youth where they are – not by preaching, or telling them how good it is for them to read; rather, by relating to them, one-on-one, and modeling the path to learning and success. Annie's vision of a level playing field for all citizens of Los Angeles becomes a reality at the Pacific Palisades branch.

Similarly, she draws on her background as a Master Gardener in programs designed to expose Angelenos to the basics of growing food. This is uncharted territory for most people living in this vast, concrete city. (Many of her patrons live in "food deserts" where nutritious food is inaccessible. Their neighborhoods are overwhelmed by fast-food restaurants, instead of markets offering fresh food and produce.) Her gardening workshops empower people to take charge of their nutrition by teaching them how to grow their own food. She leads programs called "Teen Cuisine," "Container Garden," and "Worm Bin." She also encourages budding entrepreneurs to sell their produce and products at local farmers' markets. A favorite workshop involved students making botanical soaps utilizing the herbs from her garden. The students made over 100 soaps and sold them at the local farmer's market. And in a spirit of giving, they donated their earnings to an orphanage in Mexico.

Annie continues to travel to branches throughout the Los Angeles Public Library system. She is an avid supporter and expert facilitator in the “To Live and Dine in LA” program, which “uses food as a lens to explore the city’s culture [...] to look at issues of food, equity, hunger, health and other issues related to food and community.” The extensive knowledge and compassion she brings into the communities via the library system makes her an exceptional advocate for all who live in this diverse city.

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

As a member of the Empty Nester Support Group, which Annie initiated earlier this year, the quality of my life and those of the other participants have changed in subtle, yet powerful ways. Again, she responded to a need and created what one mother describes as “a safe community to share thoughts and insights at a difficult period in life. It’s a safe port in the storm, if you will, where I gain emotional support and a lot of helpful information.” And this group member reminds us that Annie is an amazing librarian because she loves sharing information, whether a helpful book, website, article, or access to financial aid and scholarships -- the list goes on. And in an overwhelming world of digital information, Annie is a dream curator.

The Empty Nest Group meets monthly, and reads books that Annie researches and recommends. She leads the discussions in a professional and inviting manner. So far, we’ve read books by Karen Stabiner, Katrina Kenison, Suzanne Braun Levine and Gretchen Rubin, to name a few. There’s definitely a sense in the group that we are calmer, wiser and even optimistic about our life-changing circumstances. Books have a way of bridging the gap between feelings and ideas. We access our individual concerns and share them in supportive discussions. One conversation leads to another, just as one book leads to another, and another, and so on. The library becomes vibrant and alive because it offers resources that truly reflect the human condition. At this stage, the group is comprised of all women, and so our particular needs are highlighted. What a relief! Our collective spirit is grounded in the search for identity, wisdom, reflection and community. In a complex world, it’s refreshing to find harmony with people who, at first, are strangers, but eventually become friends and allies.

Our group continues to expand its boundaries beyond book discussions. Annie brought in a renowned career strategist to provide information on current employment opportunities, given that many of us have new-found freedom to pursue different career paths. The real-world of employment for women in mid-life is a serious concern, and the speaker gave us first-rate information about possible directions to consider. As always, Annie supplemented the seminar with valuable resources available through the library. She often reminds us that there are over 6 million items available for us to borrow through the library system.

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

The Pacific Palisades Library has evolved from a quaint branch to a facility that serves a variety of needs for the community. It stretches the bounds of what libraries are today, and what they will become in the future. Annie’s leadership has been like a pebble

thrown into a pond – she has created many ongoing ripples. Her achievements extend far beyond the confines of the library. It is now a gathering place for people to come together and interact, face-to-face, with one another.

Annie has sponsored Big Read events, a program that requires her to do extensive research on specific authors and books to be addressed. For example, in order to prepare for a program on Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake," she thoroughly researched the book and the author's biography. To take it one step further, she created a mood for the discussion by reaching out to a patron who prepared Indian dishes and decorated the library with Indian fabrics and objects. There really is a marked difference between sitting in chairs and listening to a speaker relay the key points of a book, versus experiencing the exciting world an author creates. It's like experiencing the "madeleine cookie" from Proust's "Remembrance of Things Past," so to speak. The senses are awakened and the reader travels to a specific time and place. Connecting to books in this manner reminds us that stories can have infinite meaning in our lives. It's a palpable gift when you walk into a room especially prepared for you and your community. The message is: "You matter and belong here. We are neighbors. Together we are going to share something special." That's when the book and discussion unite to become a vibrant experience.

Annie is a beloved leader who endlessly pursues opportunities for her patrons. For example, she attended a program at another library and was captivated by the extraordinary book club facilitator, Judith Palarz. Due to Annie's tenacity, Ms. Palarz now holds court at the Pacific Palisades branch where her talent for leading a professional, in-depth critique and discussion serves the needs of our community of voracious readers. Her first seminar attracted over 80 patrons of every age and demographic.

The ability to seek out new ways of bringing information and learning opportunities into the library continually propels Annie in interesting directions. She has applied for and received training to deliver STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) programs for youth. She attended the Curiosity Machine Professional Development Training at Iridescent Learning's facility in downtown Los Angeles, and did her best to construct a wind and earthquake resistant tower made entirely of construction paper, tape, rubber bands, paper plates and a tennis ball. As she reports, it was exhilarating to pass the wind test and very nearly pass the earthquake test. She invited the Curiosity Course's program manager to lead sessions at our branch. (Of course!) The community room filled with families who built suspension bridges constructed out of toothpicks and gumdrops. She followed that up with a project to develop balloon-propelled helicopters using helium balloons, straws, paper and metal plates and rubber bands. A few families successfully completed the project, but every family asked for future, hands-on STEAM programs at the library.

Annie develops forward-thinking initiatives and programs that enhance the lives of all her patrons. She enthusiastically embraces opportunities that serve the needs of a diverse community. Her emphasis on training teens in the workings of the library has resulted in

paying jobs for many of them. In addition, she understands that Los Angeles has decimated art programming in the public schools. She sought out programming that addressed this alarming deficit in the education of our public school students. For example, she partnered with Electronic Arts to hold an electronic gaming workshop. She also hosted a five-week Poetry/Hip-Hop and Spoken Word workshop co-sponsored by Urban Word LA, and invited TEDx speaker and poet Rachel Kann to teach and prepare a committed group of teens for the second LA Youth Poet Laureate contest.

Annie's personal biography, which includes being a professional broadcast journalist and producer for 20 years, enables her to connect easily with people from all corners of Los Angeles. In fact, she often remarks that librarianship and journalism share common threads: she knows how to research, get the best speakers, develop outstanding programs and market them to her audience. In this case, her audience is the wider community of this vast city. And we are extremely grateful for her dynamic leadership and presence in our lives.

***NOTE: Annie Cipolla's nomination was resubmitted this year with the following additional information:**

In 2017, Annie Cipolla was promoted to the position of Senior Librarian at the John C. Fremont Library Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library system. Given the unique characteristics of Los Angeles neighborhoods, this particular library has a different vibe from her prior assignment at the Palisades Branch, where she served as the Young Adult librarian. She recently completed her first six months at this location.

Upon her arrival, Annie noticed that Fremont programming was focused primarily on children and youth. In a short time, she introduced programming that transformed the branch into a community hub. It now sponsors multiple workshops, reading groups, performances, talks, language lessons, tutoring – something to interest everyone, of all ages.

Annie recruited Meg Rusett, a University of Southern California (U.S.C.) English professor, to lead the "Big Read" program on the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Meg reports that she is now in touch with the programmer for the LA Made series, an opportunity that she would not have ferreted on her own. "I owe Annie a personal debt – but I think this example shows how proactive she is in identifying available talent."

Annie also reports that she had a "win" while addressing the need of a homeless patron who frequented the library daily. She tirelessly worked through bureaucratic channels, but eventually connected with social service agencies, and finally found support through a local church. This patron is no longer homeless. So often, the homeless receive surface attention and are perceived to be nuisances by the general public. But not when Annie is in charge. Seriously. She gets results. Perhaps her compassion stems from the overwhelming challenges she and her family overcame so many years ago: her parents escaped the Communist Revolution in China. They landed on the Lower Eastside in New

York City, impoverished and unable to speak English. As a little girl, she was able to transform and thrive, due to educational opportunities. She recounts her journey beautifully in 10-minute TEDxYouth Talk she delivered a few years ago, which was produced by members of her Teen Council)
(www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOoeXoP0N6U)

Thank you for the opportunity to honor Annie Cipolla, a librarian who follows her True North, and who encourages everyone who meets her, to do the same.