

I Love My Librarian!

2017 Award

Laurie Doan

Tredyffrin Public Library
Strafford, Pennsylvania

Nominator: Nora Margolis

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

As a parent of two teenagers and a child and adolescent psychiatrist, I recognize the health of our community and world is reflected in how we care for and encourage our young adults. Laurie Doan too understands that we live in a precarious world today where teens are confronted with so many challenges including peer pressure, substance abuse, mental health issues, academic and social pressures and the challenge of finding their place in the world. In the process of writing this recommendation, I reached out to teens, Laurie's colleagues, parents and teachers in our community and was flooded with reasons why Laurie Doan should win this award including remembering Laurie's own words, she once told me that her goal as a teen librarian, "was not to build the greatest generation but to build what might need to be the most resilient generation."

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?

I've experienced Laurie's contributions to our library as not only a positive one but as transformative for our teens. As one teen Claire put it, "Laurie helps each kid discover his or her passion. Then, she does everything she can to help us develop those passions."

Laurie saw early on that Tredyffrin Library had a unique space that was underutilized by teens. She looked at the room and thought what could it become? What could the teens do here?

Laurie took a leap of faith when my then 16 year old son, Matt, approached her and said, "I need to raise \$1000 for my Eagle Scout landscaping project at the Valley Forge Freedoms Foundation. Could I DJ a dance party for 100 kids?" Matt said, "She helped me turn the library into a dance hall. From there, she helped me run additional events for many other local charities, connecting money starved charities, students eager for entertainment, and DJ's looking for a spot to play." The skills and confidence that Matt developed from these events and the supervision that Laurie gave him are largely responsible for his continued love for quality music programming that has continued to this day, where he is now deputy executive director of UC Berkeley's Dance Marathon

that has raised over 50K for pediatric aids and the booking coordinator of UC Berkeley's concerts programming board that entertains over 26,000 undergrads. If you want to see what a dance party at a library looks like, google "lights out after hours wrap up video".

Necessity being the mother of invention, upon learning that students had an avid interest in theater, but were often cut from the highly competitive high school musicals and drama's, Laurie again took a leap of faith. Recognizing how vital performance opportunities are in developing teen's creativity and confidence, she created a "second theater" at our library where BOOKS COULD COME TO LIFE. The teens have produced over a dozen productions in the space. Their experiences with theater at Tredyffrin Public Library helped them grow in ways they will carry with them beyond high school. Caroline noted, "I am going to Rochester Institute of Technology, majoring in biomedical sciences, and I will definitely participate in the productions and hope to join drama club there. The theater allowed me to meet new people and get to know them. I would have the amazing opportunity to work with others who are also passionate about acting and would make new friends. It also let me be active in acting when I couldn't get to act in my school's productions. I had experienced stage fright despite my love for acting, and the library helped me to decrease it."

Just like the movie Field of Dreams as in if you build it they will come, as the teens saw others use the space in innovative ways to develop their passions, the library became their field of dreams. For one young filmmaker, Laurie gave him a red carpet treatment for the premiere of his film Harry Potter and the New York Psycho. Filmmaker, Andrew, currently attends Villanova University where he helps run the Villanova student theater. He says, "Laurie Doan is a wonderful mentor and friend. I will always be grateful to Ms. Doan for her support and kindness. I would like to thank her for the great skills and knowledge that she has imparted on me. Her contribution towards my success today is highly acknowledged. She is less of a teacher to me but more of a mentor and an inspiration."

If you want to see how a library is transformed into a red carpet premiere you can go to the ASKM youtube channel and click "Grace on the red carpet".

As former colleague and teen parent Susan Smart says so wisely, "Laurie listened to her teenage constituents and planned events and programs that reflected their interests and needs. When students wanted to plan a fundraiser, plan projects or programs that interested them, she offered space and support. The library became known among the teens as a place where they can express themselves and give back to their community. She supports the student planners in any way necessary: decorations, chaperones, sound and lighting, helping to set up, clean up and keep everyone safe and happy.

Laurie also has a deep concern for her teens' well-being and has a keen eye on the issues they are dealing with daily. As she works with them on various projects, she always has an eye on whether they are having a positive experience, and she will invest thought and time to improve any negative situations. She is dedicated to making sure the leaders are

successful and the timid gain confidence. All this has improved the lives of teens and made our community a better place.”

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

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, but more importantly as a parent, I recognize just like the famous psychologist, Maslow, that certain needs must be met for an individual or a community to thrive. Other parents and I have counted on the library to help our teens develop their higher needs of belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

Laurie helps teens improve their lives and contributes effectively to our community and the larger world. The teens in our community have raised close to \$10,000 from events at the library to support causes such as hunger in developing countries, music and art starved programs in the US, and school supplies for children in our own community. Enabling our teens to “pay it forward” has made a difference in our community.

Fellow librarian, Gretchen Chamberlin, understands this, “Laurie should win this award because she goes far beyond the basics of her job working with teens--she is a leader and a mentor who provides many real opportunities for teens to stretch their wings and learn essential life skills in a safe and supported way. One out of many specific examples which could be listed is the performance camp for youth that she started at the library, which is now in its third year. The instructors are music education and performing art majors in college who she met in middle and high school. The ties with these teens have lasted and grown over the years. She meets the students where they live, essentially—she knows their teachers and goes to school plays and performances and sports events. She has nominated teens for scholarship and other awards and made the community aware of these special young people and their skills and promise for the future.”

Budding teen theater director, Max, said, “Laurie uses her resources as a librarian to help better the community around her, especially the local teenagers. She goes beyond the job requirement to share her passions with the community and ignite that same passion in others. I, a sophomore in high school, approached Laurie, whom I had no previous relationship with and told her that I wanted to produce and direct a musical using the library space. Not only did she give me the space for rehearsal purposes for free, she became my mentor and partner. She helped me through the whole process from big things like attaining the rights to the production to smaller things like printing posters for me. She became an advocate for my artistic endeavor, advertising to community members and helping me improve upon the production through the connections she had throughout the community that she made by treating them with respect and never taking something from someone without giving more. And the most inspiring thing about this is that Laurie expected nothing in return but the satisfaction and inspiration she gets from helping others and sharing with the community her passion.”

Laurie benefits the community because she’s a part of the community, she has relationships with the teachers, she volunteers with numerous social organizations that benefit teens in our community, and takes every opportunity to get out in the community. Examples would be chaperoning the high school state National History Day competition

and middle school bowling trip with Valley Forge Middle School. Laurie even uses her vacation time to help with local charities such as T and E cares that benefits low income teens and their families in our community. High school English teacher, Cynthia Hyatt said, "Laurie is the most supportive public librarian I have ever worked with in my life. Her energy and commitment for teens getting involved in their community is incomparable. Laurie is perhaps the most positive person I know. I never hear of unkind word come from her mouth. She always puts a positive spin on everything. No task is too great for her. No request too great. She is 100% committed to her work and to the betterment of her community."

The bridges that Laurie has built in the community were wonderfully illustrated with The Hundred Dresses musical based on the book by Eleanor Estes. This musical adaptation masterfully handled such topics as bullying, friendship, and forgiveness. I know it touched the hearts of the teen performers and audience members alike, and even helped teens being bullied. The show involved teen actors, teen directors, TE Middle School students including members of the football team who drew the hundred dresses, merchants who helped buy the rights, and audience members of all ages who attended.

As Herman Melville stated, "We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men." Laurie lives this statement every day.

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

Quality of life improves when you feel that have some control over your life. Laurie understands this unique developmental milestone for teenagers who are no longer children but who are not adults yet. For the teens in our community the library has become a much needed venue where all teens can explore and find their passions, take chances, and make friends in a safe supportive setting.

As one mom understood, the challenges for autonomy can be particularly hard for teens with differences. Karen stated, "Laurie embraced my son despite his challenges with Asperger's. She saw passion and creativity where most people just see a child who is different. With Laurie's guidance my son got to act in musicals at the library and from there had the confidence to participate in advanced theatre classes at his high school and participate in a dramatic group presentation for National History Day state competition where he made it to the final round. People with disabilities often find trouble finding jobs. Laurie's helped to build his professional skills by providing him with an internship at the library. This will help prepare my son for the future working world."

Another mom felt that, "For Caroline, playing the role of Peggy in The Hundred Dresses was a poignant exercise in channeling real life experience to bring true emotion to a fictional character. Caroline was born with a severe to profound hearing loss. Bullying and social ostracism are experiences commonly shared by children with hearing loss. Playing the role of the bully was a unique experience provided by theatre allowing Caroline to stand on the other side. These are the experiences that give children the wisdom and strength to grow into empathetic and responsible leaders."

Laurie often speaks of using the “ladder of participation” with teens, where the middle rungs involve informing teens and consulting them, she took them up to the upper rungs where they would have more of a hand in driving the program. This was beautifully demonstrated with another teen’s service project. Recent graduate Daniel said, “I stumbled upon the Library of Congress's Veterans' History Project. The project included making video interviews about the veteran's lives to be stored at the Library of Congress for historians and families. Ms. Doan let me know with her typical enthusiasm that both she and the library were there to provide support and resources to help me achieve my goal. Throughout the trials and tribulations of the project, finding Veterans and videographers from the community, scheduling interviews around frequent snowstorms, and learning how to conduct a successful interview, Ms. Doan was always there to guide and direct me. At no time did she take away from my independence or leadership role in the project but remained a powerful guiding star, allowing me the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them, while ensuring that I had everything I needed to succeed. I will always remember the funny image of her knee deep in the snowstorm bribing the sledders outside our window to stop screeching until I finished interviewing the vets.”

For teen Emily, her quality of life improved when she moved here. “My family was in the process of moving from Chicago to Pennsylvania when I heard that my piano was going to be moved separately and not for a considerable amount of time. Being a serious musician, this was a serious problem. So, I contacted Laurie Doan to see if she knew of any schools or other venues that owned a piano and would allow me to use it for practice. I had never actually met Laurie and had only corresponded with her via email for a couple of weeks about library programs, so I expected her, like most, to just give me a couple of recommendations of places. But when I explained to her my dilemma, to my great surprise, she immediately contacted the local church (proud owners of a gorgeous Steinway), presented my situation to one of the ministers, and arranged for me to be able to practice every day that I was without my piano. Of course, the church had certain hours, so she also introduced me to the lovely piano that was donated to the library and granted me full permission to practice on it, given that there were no functions using it. I was incredibly touched and ever-grateful for her concern for me---a complete stranger!”

The library has become known as a place where teen’s ideas can come to life. As teen Nick states “Laurie is always cleaning the room from the last event or preparing the room for the next. She helped me to decide on becoming a teacher to help my community. Laurie will always be there as a helping hand and is great at allowing us to direct ourselves.”

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

When I reached out to teens, teachers, parents and librarians in the community I was flooded with so many wonderful stories and vignettes of how she has made the library a better place. In fact, if I included all the testimonials, it WOULD BE A BOOK!

Some quotes:

Peter said “Laurie has always been my biggest advocate. From middle school on, Laurie went above and beyond the requirements of her job to support me. When I showed interest in writing, she gave me more books and opportunities than I could ever enumerate. Laurie finds joy in helping teens explore their own potential.”

From colleague Michelle, “A teen program like this doesn’t just happen. It takes years of dedication and persistence and creativity to build, and Laurie has done that, almost single-handedly.”

Chelsea says “Laurie spreads her love of reading through her Read-Around-the-World reading program that helped me see the world through a different lens.”

Dana, teen advisory board alumni says, "I think that Laurie deserves the "I love my librarian award" because she always gives 150%. She is truly a blessing and a bright face in the library."

Brittany says “Laurie is a remarkable individual. She has such a heart for the Tredyffrin Library. I have known Laurie for five years now and she has always helped me. Laurie has definitely always believed in me and with her doing that I have believed in myself. Laurie Doan deserves this award because she had the heart, strength, and spirit for it! She is a wonderful woman!”

From Mariam, “Laurie is the most committed person to teens and the library that I've ever met. With challenges like students coming and going each year and last-minute obstacles that affect plans, Laurie is the glue that holds the program together. She is open to new ideas and has made non-library-traditional events such as dance parties, pastry-making, and choir camp part of the library's offerings. This allows me to see the library as a place with many functions in addition to a new way to experience literature.

Her motherly care for not only the intellectual but the physical and mental well-being of each teen with whom she interacts allows them to see her as someone they can confide in. Even when you don't have self-confidence, Laurie encourages you to believe the best about yourself. Believing in inclusion and equal opportunities for teens at the library, she encourages teens of all backgrounds to take leadership positions. Laurie is someone who could tackle any problem she puts her mind to and in the meantime make you learn more about the world and yourself. She deserves the "I Love My Librarian" award not only because she makes the library a thriving, living place but because the Tredyffrin Public Library is better because she is there.”

From Claire, “Laurie built from scratch a musical theater program and a summer choral camp which benefit kids of all ages. I’ve never met anyone who puts more heart and soul into her work. She is very invested in the success of each of her students. Even now that I’m in college and can’t work with the theater program anymore, Laurie still reaches out to me often with book recommendations and gives me contacts that may be helpful as I enter the professional world.”

Pennsylvania Congressman, Ryan Costello, highlighted the value of public libraries and, specifically Laurie's exceptional program in his district, "that empowers, inspires, and supports performance arts." He went on to say, "It has long been proven that students that participate in the arts have improved academic performance and a strong sense of community."

Retired middle school music teacher Anne Sprissler says it all "Laurie is a builder. She is a presence in our community. Laurie has created an environment at the library where all teens can find a place at the table.

Students will not attend any library program, no matter how trendy, unless they know they will feel, safe, valued and important. This is what makes Laurie extraordinary. She invests her own personal time in the teens. You will find Laurie at the high school concerts and performances. She is invited to graduation and attends student graduation parties. She writes letters of recommendations with care - she knows the students. She champions the underdog. She is a coach and a guide as much as a librarian. Those students who did not make the cut in other areas are accepted and respected and many become leaders because she gave them opportunity. She is kind and generous.

One of the musical theater campers wrote on a poster at the library - "Thank you for making me feel loved and that I fit in."

This is exactly why Laurie Doan is an exceptional community librarian and should win this award."