

# Memo

To: Paul McIntosh

From: Ann Myers

Re: Library Journal award

Hello -

As you may have heard our library has been selected as the "Best Small library in America" for 2005 by the library journal and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

I wanted to share this article with you and to express our heartfelt thanks once again for the

assistance the Denali Commission gave to us as we raised \$ for the new library. You helped through

indeed on a project that makes a difference to residents each day. Thank you!  
Ann Myers

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[haineslibrary.org](http://haineslibrary.org)

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# LIBRARYJOURNAL®

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IN THE BOOK REVIEW

Mystery, Christian Fiction

Sex and Baseball

Best Small Library  
in America 2005



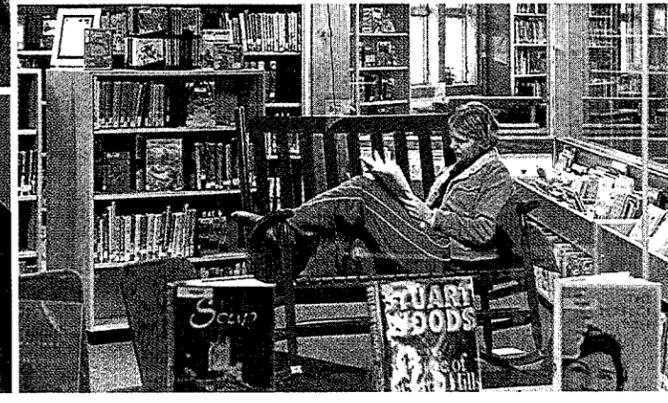
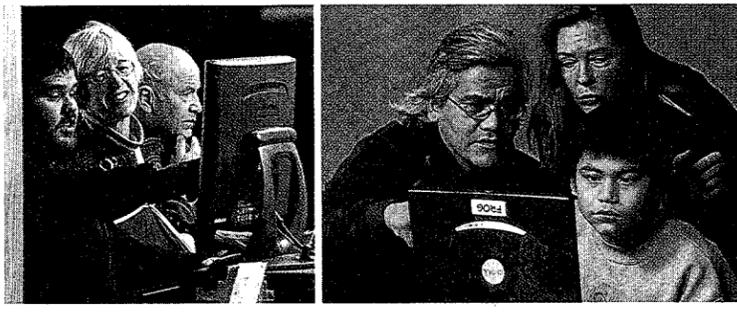
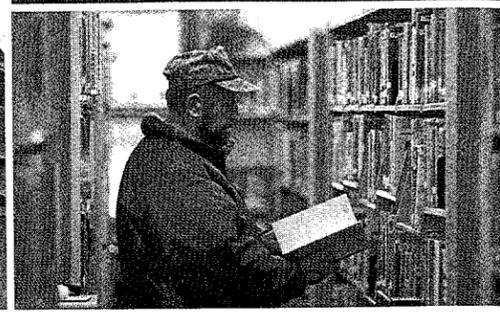
# The Library Haines

Haines Borough PL, Alaska

# Built



**HOME, HOME AT THE HAINES:** (top row, l.-r.) The 8400 square foot facility, including the main reading room, was completed in 2003; the town's waterfront locale looks quiet enough in winter, but just wait till the cruise ships pull into port. Director Ann Myren, with her dog, Tahvi, is proud of the collaboration among citizens that keeps the library vital. (bottom row, l.-r.) Haines resident Dave Hoffmeister looks through the collection; unfiltered computers engage Lee Bryant and Margaret and Robert Plucker, participating in the Dragonfly Project are Wayne Price, his son Steven, and his partner and library board member Cherri Rakers, "the young teaching the old"; one patron makes herself comfortable while losing herself in a book



# THE LIBRARY

Best Small Library in America 2005:

"Community involvement," the standard cliché, doesn't come close to capturing the spirit and action that have structured the building, programs, collections, and services of the Haines Borough Public Library (HBPL), AK. Those achievements make HBPL the winner of the first annual award for the Best Small Library in America, cosponsored by *Library Journal* and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Haines is a remote community of 2600, about 70 miles north-east of Juneau as the crow flies, but that takes either half an hour by bush plane or three to five hours by boat. About 20 percent of the people who live there and use the library are members of the Chilkoot Indian Association or the Chilkat Indian Village, both Tlingit tribes native to the region.

The facts of the library, impressive by themselves, only hint at the huge investment by nearly everyone in Haines. The library's circulation, now at 112,520, has increased 77 percent in the past five years, 27 percent last year alone. Free, unfiltered public Internet access, coupled with a variety of technology training and software applications, has meant more than 28,000 user sessions a year, tripling in five years and up 70 percent last year. The library budget of \$293,000 comes from Haines Borough citizens, who tax themselves to the tune of

\$113 per capita for library service. That also covers use by tourists and seasonal residents. The library spends about 11 percent of that budget on collections. Most of the money (\$270,000) comes from property taxes. The rest is revenue from book sales, fines, and small donations. HBPL is visited roughly 67,000 times a year.

"We didn't [include] in our [award] application that Haines has tax resistance," says Director Ann Myren, "but, of course, we do. We have to work pretty hard for our budget, especially in the last year." The community, in a newly combined government of town and borough (like a county), passed a tax cap. The amount collected had to be reduced. Myren thinks that might make it harder to sustain the budget.

## Volunteers, Friends, trustees

The HBPL staff is the equivalent of five full-timers but is nearly all part-time employees, about eight total. Myren became a librarian when she first moved to Alaska and worked in a media center for a small school system. She took classes in library science at the University of Utah but didn't get her MLS. Next June she'll complete her 20th year at HBPL. Patrons and staff love her, and people get nervous when she mentions retirement.

In a way, everyone in town works in the library. It is the contacts and diversity of the paid staff, the library board, the

PHOTOS © 2005 MARK KELLER

# HAINES BUILT

Haines Borough Public Library, Haines, AK

By John N. Berry III

board of the Friends of the Library, and the amazing 75 volunteers that keep the library alert to the needs of its users.

The volunteers work at the desk, on special projects, story time, and, of course, routine tasks like shelving books. "All of our evening hours, 7-9 p.m. every day, are completely staffed by volunteers," says Myren. "That is a tradition of our library."

## Dragonfly transforms

The Dragonfly Project, a partnership between HBPL and the Chilkoot Indian Association, dramatically displays the creativity and change that can come from local collaboration primed with outside support. It is one of two projects in which the library and the Chilkoots have partnered. Beyond benefiting the whole community, it has transformed it. The dragonfly is a Tlingit symbol for transformation. The project, funded by an Enhancement Grant for Native Americans from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), teaches at-risk youth the skills and patience to become technology mentors and experts for the rest of the community, especially older folks not yet computer-literate. It works like a charm. Mentors, age ten to 21, write curricula and develop classes and one-on-one sessions. They provide support for people, and HBPL lends laptops inside the building, which has wireless access. In its second phase, the project expanded to digital media and filmmaking.

The DVDs and tapes produced, most about Native American culture, are now a popular part of the library's collection.

"It has been fun to see the young teaching the old," Myren says. She tells of one boy, often in trouble before Dragonfly, who is now known in town as "Professor Mike." He gets calls at home to help people with their computer problems and even makes house calls. Myren credits the Chilkoots for having the vision to make the program serve everyone. Linda

## ABOUT THE BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA AWARD

*LJ's* annual award for the Best Small Library in America, cosponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has been founded to encourage and showcase the exemplary work of libraries serving populations under 25,000. The criteria for the award include creativity in developing novel services and programs; innovations in public access; community development; equity; support; and evidence of the library's impact on the community.

The award is given to the library that receives a \$10,000 cash award from the Gates Foundation. Candidates are selected by a panel of representatives to attend the Annual Meeting of the Association of Public Librarians and Information Science (APLIS) in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit [www.libraryjournal.com](http://www.libraryjournal.com).

John N. Berry III is Editor-in-Chief, *LJ*

Moyer, who coordinates Dragonfly for HBPL, worked to get kids involved and keep them coming. She designs the wonderful graphics and posters that attract people to Dragonfly, and her artistic skills have changed the look of the library and its image in the community.

The Chilkoot Association also partnered with HBPL on after-school programs. "We are pleased that a multicultural focus has been taken in regard to library services and that ties between our Tribal members and the community are being strengthened," says Chilkoot VP Dave Berry.

### Unfiltered access

If Dragonfly unleashed a new era of technology at HBPL, the leadership of Myren and the board made sure it was both free of charges and liberated from restraints. "We are unfiltered!" Myren says with pride. HBPL gets E-rate money for its telephone connection but not for the Internet. It was a unanimous policy decision by the board. The members believed people had the right to see what they wanted but also noted that the cost of filtering and the cost to monitor filtering wasn't worth it. In addition, the evening staff of volunteers would have had to learn how to remove filters. "Filtering wouldn't have made any money for us," says Myren. "It would just make things more complex, while taking away the freedom of people to view what they want."

### Building a library

The same spirit, involving nearly everyone in town and many people from outside, built HBPL's current library. Opened in January 2003, it is a beauty, made all the more magnificent by the outside and local community hands and resources that created it. First, a \$400,000 local bond issue passed with 67 percent of the vote. To that amount were added grants from Alaska's Rasmusen Foundation, Murdock Charitable Trust, and Paul Allen Foundation; the hard work on fundraising events by the Friends group; and, biggest of all, rural development money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There were other grants, too. In the end, HBPL raised \$2.5 million. With the cash came many in-kind donations. One local craftsman contributed a week of his time to help build library furniture. The new library is right in the center of town, on a site adjacent to all the school



**ACTIVITY CENTER:** (clockwise from top l.) The Haines Borough PL is a place for celebration year round: children's and youth services coordinator Holly Davis works with elementary school children on a science project; library aide Kelsey Albaeker helps residents Greg Brask and Erma Schnabel with checkout; local Big Brothers/Big Sisters convene in the conference room; and Carol Waifo reads to her grandson Seth in the children's reading room



property, with a good view of the Cathedral Mountains. The library is still collecting native species to complete the HBPL gardens and landscaping.

### Everyone helped

Myren worked on the grant applications for the building with major assistance from HBPL board member Cecily Stern. The two also wrote the Dragonfly Project application and several others. Grants brought HBPL \$116,000 in 2004.

"Our library's success can be traced to the support of our entire community," says Myren, citing the board, volunteers, Friends, local organizations, staff, patrons, and "of course, municipal government." That community extends to outside agencies, foundations, partners, and funders, including the Alaska State Library (ASL) staff and grant programs. Myren says the state library has provided mentors, facilitators, partners, and supporters in many ways, from training sessions to including HBPL in grant applications.

ASL offers HBPL lots of day-to-day advice and assistance. State Library Interlibrary Cooperation Grants and Public Library Assistance grants helped HBPL form a cooperative effort with the school district, upgrade to an online catalog, and expand the Dragonfly Project. "For small rural libraries like ours, this support has been incredibly important," says Myren.

### Issues, values, perspective

"The consensus of our staff and board is that in a small community where resources and opportunities are limited, it is important that the library is there for everybody," says Myren, answering a question about HBPL's effort to provide varied services. "We try to make sure that when people walk in, they feel welcome and know that they are going to get our attention. We want them to know that we are there for them."

Though HBPL helps people with research needs through interlibrary loan, "we're not trying to be a research library,"

Myren continues. She and the staff, board, and volunteers work to find out what their community needs. HBPL surveys patrons every two years, about 20 questions, about the collection and services. "We want our library to be used for many things, not just traditional library services. That way people come and use it."

HBPL is engaged in many other partnerships and programs. The library spearheaded the creation of the Southeast Alaska Network with the University of Alaska, state library, and Southeast Alaska Regional Resource Center. It linked with the local school district, local government, chamber of commerce, and local businesses in a public/private partnership to strengthen Internet access.

The HBPL Perspectives programs developed a monthly series of dialogs on public issues with expert speakers on comparative religion, native culture, civic engagement, music, and ecology. HBPL has a half-dozen or more programs for young people. Combined, the programs

attracted up to 700 first-timers to the library. In one year, the library hosted some 39 adult and six youth events and eight musical performances, out of which the library created a PowerPoint presentation on "How To Develop a Speakers Program," now posted on the HBPL web site (haineslibrary.org).

### Celebration central

"We like to celebrate," says Myren. The new library is "the place" in Haines. When the 22' Christmas tree is put up, Frankie Jones exercises her talent as a decorator and leads a community holiday decorating spree to get HBPL beautified for the season. Then everyone attends a holiday party called "the Lighting of the Library," and those who can, kick in donations. The big room and even the whole library can be rented for wedding receptions and other festivities. The Haines Homecoming Dance is held there as well.

As the seasonal workers and tourists come to town, the library gets really

### BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA 2005 SPECIAL MENTION

Haines Borough PL was in excellent company among the 143 nominations LJ received for the inaugural award for the Best Small Library in America. The many outstanding institutions submitted are a testament to the incredible work done in libraries across the country every day. Several of the nominees feature the services, programs, and commitment to community that signify the Best Small Library in America:

Houghton Lake Public Library MI

Donna J. Alward, Director

LaSalle Public Library IL

Laura Frizol, Director

Page Public Library AZ

Judy Hart, Library Director

Pelican Rapids Public Library MN

Pamela Westby, Library Director

### BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA 2005 JUDGES

LJ thanks the following library professionals who volunteered their valuable time to help select the Best Small Library in America 2005:

Jessica Dorz, Project Coordinator,

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Deborah Jacobs, City Librarian, Seattle

Public Library, LJ Librarian of the Year 1994

Jane Light, Director, San José Public

Library, LJ Library of the Year 2004

Jo Ann Pinder, Executive Director,

Gwinnett County Public Library, GA,

LJ Library of the Year 2000; Public Library

Association past-president

Bernard Vavrek, Director, Center for the Study

of Rural Librarianship and Professor of Library

Science, Clarion University of Pennsylvania

The panel also includes LJ staff: John N. Berry

III, Francine Fialkoff, Brian Kenney, Rebecca

Miller, Norman Oder, & Michael Rogers

busy. When cruise ships dock, as they do two or three times a week in the summer, there are lines waiting to get in to HBPL to use the Internet.

But right now, when the sun breaks over the mountains at about 9:30 a.m. and sets just after 3:30 p.m. and only the 2600 year-round Haines citizens are around, that library is a seven-day-a-week beacon. It's like Christy Tengs Fowler, a local business owner, said about the library: "For visitors, it is an inviting place to connect with the outside world and even stay a bit longer in ours...for locals, it is a sanctuary in which to retreat from a sometimes hard life, then go back out in the world rejuvenated." ■

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