



the Crab

The Digital Magazine of the Maryland Library Association

Volume 56, Number 3 • Spring, 2026

SHARE *the* KNOWLEDGE!



happy hour crochet & knitting

More Than Yarn

Crafting a
Community
One Stitch
at a Time
19



The Digital Magazine of the Maryland Library Association • Volume 56, Number 3 • Spring, 2026

FEATURE ARTICLES

Highlights from the Winter 2026 Maryland State Library Resource Center (SLRC) Public Services Conference: Beyond the Desk: Strengthening Service & Self ◆◆ 15

The 2026 conference, with the theme of “Beyond the Desk: Strengthening Service & Self,” gave 130 attendees opportunities to learn how to enhance and improve public services, while also learning how to incorporate healthy practices into their everyday lives.

More Than Yarn: Crafting a Community One Stitch at a Time ◆◆ 19

At the Potomac Branch of the Charles County Public Library, Happy Hour Crochet & Knitting is an opportunity where creativity and community intertwine for participants who represent a wide range of ages and experience levels, with the goal of offering both creative expression and meaningful connection.

School Field Trips to the Library ◆◆ 21

The biggest school collaboration to date for the Bladensburg Branch of Prince George’s County Memorial Library System is welcoming the entire student body of Bladensburg Elementary School, which is located two blocks from the branch. The field trips have led to a deeper and more rewarding relationship with students, school leaders, teachers, and the school community as a whole.



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MARYLAND COMMISSION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

BOOK DRIVE

— 2 0 2 5 - 2 0 2 6 —

The Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) 3rd Annual Statewide Book Drive invites Marylanders to make an impact!



How to Participate

- **Donate**
Please, contact your respective local public library staff for more information regarding donation sites near you.
- **Host an Event**
You can also host a book drive and giveaway within your own community.

LAUNCH *Emancipation Day*
01 NOV 2025

UNTIL *Juneteenth*
19 JUN 2026

The MCAAHC serves to be a voice and venue against the marginalization, false narratives, book banning, and other systemic practices that suppress, subordinate, and misrepresent the history of Maryland African Americans.



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Kennedy Wilson
Chair



Commissioner
Jaelon T. Moaney
Vice Chair

For more information, visit:
africanamerican.maryland.gov/book-drive

Questions? Contact:
mcaahcbookdrive@gmail.com

Editor's Note

Happy Spring, *Crab* readers!

Reading through this quarter's news and features, I was struck by one thing: in a challenging environment, Maryland libraries are meeting the moment and exceeding expectations. In particular, I'd like to point to MLA's Intellectual Freedom Panel (IFP). With book challenges taking place nationwide, the IFP has sponsored great programs (and has four more scheduled for the MLA/DLA Conference) to help library workers develop appropriate responses and a shared understanding of the resources available to those fighting censorship in our libraries and public schools.

If you're not familiar with all of those resources, join an IFP meeting, read their quarterly summary of intellectual freedom news in *the Crab*, and familiarize yourself with a tool created especially for Maryland library workers: the [Maryland Library Helpline](#), a volunteer-run initiative and one-stop resource for help. The Maryland Library Helpline was designed to provide an accessible and immediate means for library workers to report challenges from all types of libraries anywhere in Maryland. MLA is proud to support library workers by helping them navigate these challenges.

The conference committee is finalizing preparations for another amazing [MLA/DLA Conference](#) in Cambridge, Maryland, May 6-8, with the theme of "Our Stories, Our Shelves." MLA Conference Director Paula Maciel, Assistant Conference Director Mike Kiel, the conference committee, and the MLA staff have spent the last year planning and preparing to make this an unparalleled opportunity for Maryland and Delaware library workers. If you're headed to Cambridge, take advantage of all that the conference offers: preconference sessions, interactive



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workshops, presentations from the featured keynote speakers, and the fun social activities that are always a hit with participants. Catch up with old friends and meet new colleagues; share your ideas in conference sessions and gather ideas from others to take back to your schools, libraries, and branches. As always, if you're inspired to share what you've learned with readers of *the Crab*, submissions are welcome! We'd love to publish your thoughts about sessions you attended, summaries and slides of your presentations, and/or some fun photographs in our annual conference photo spread.

Writing this as National Library Week gets underway, I hope that you are finding your joy through celebrations, conversations, and customer interactions that demonstrate the important role you have in helping patrons use library collections and resources, educate themselves and others, meet their personal and professional goals, and

strengthen their communities. Library workers are a vital part of advocating for library use and support, and your value to Maryland school, public, academic, and special libraries cannot be overstated.

Julie Fitzpatrick, MLA Crab Editor
Howard County Library System ■

President's Message

David Dahl, MLA President

University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions Library Consortium



IN PREPARATION TO WRITE MY LAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, I took a few minutes to review my past messages. Admittedly, my primary objective was to avoid repeating myself too much. (I was relieved to see that I haven't been too repetitive so far—hopefully you'll agree!) In review, though, I found a moment of appreciation as I round the corner into the last leg of my time as President. Thanks to the dedication of our members, especially our volunteer leaders, we've accomplished a lot. It's been my pleasure to have the opportunity to represent MLA and Maryland's libraries.

One of those recent opportunities was participating in a panel, speaking with MLIS students at University of Maryland's College of Information about the importance—and benefits—of association service. Across all of the panelists, there were some common themes that one could draw from our various experiences: (1) association service is one of the best ways to build a network of lifelong connections; (2) association service is a great way to gain experiences that can help prepare us for future job roles and responsibilities; and (3) our associations are an important part of our library ecosystem, providing continuing education, networking opportunities, and advocacy for libraries and library workers.

If you're still looking to get involved, there's room for everyone. As this year's members of the Executive Board and Advisory Council wrap up their terms, opportunities for new volunteers will become available. We have roles both big and small depending on how much time you're able to commit. [Reach out to a member of the Board](#) to find out what opportunities might be the right fit for you. If you're interested in getting involved in our divisions, I encourage you to reach out to our current division leaders.

We've done important work over the past several months. MLA partnered with

Maryland Public Television on a screening of the documentary *The Librarians*, followed by a panel discussion. Well over 300 individuals attended. We held a successful Maryland Library Legislative Day that drew a standing ovation from our legislators during the proclamation. We spoke out in opposition to federal legislation that would allow the federal government to ban books and regulate the right to read. We called on the state to reconsider regulatory language that could weaken staffing requirements for certified school librarians across Maryland's public schools. There's more to do, and our engaged, activated, and invested members are what makes this work possible.

With our election closed, we also begin welcoming in our next cohort of leaders who will steer the association through future opportunities and challenges. Thank you to all those elected for your commitment to MLA. I look forward to congratulating you at the conference! MLA is in good hands. Even after my presidency ends, I suspect there's one thing that I'll continue to repeat for the foreseeable future —there's never been a better time to be an MLA member! ■

Vice President's Message

Conni Strittmatter, Baltimore County Public Library



WITH MY TERM AS VICE-PRESIDENT COMING TO A CLOSE, I am looking forward to how I will spend my time as President of the Maryland Library Association. One of my biggest focuses will be to set MLA's future up for success. Who will be the future leaders of MLA? How do we ensure that folks throughout Maryland libraries know there is a place for them in this organization? As I've talked with many of you about getting involved, I've also asked myself how I got to the place where I was up for election as the MLA President.

Someone Invited Me

Amanda Roberson was deeply involved in the then-Children's Services Division. She started working in my county at the time—Harford. We worked closely together in youth services there. Amanda mentioned to me how valuable Maryland Library Association meetings are—an excellent way to find new ideas, visit other libraries, meet like-minded colleagues, and maybe step into a leadership role one day. I attended a meeting and suddenly I was a part of MLA. I'm sure many of you have similar stories of how you got involved; it's really that easy. But sometimes, we forget that we've now become the inviters. Who do you work with who could benefit from attending meetings for an Interest Group or Division? Who has promising leadership skills but needs an outlet to expand? Invite them! Go to a meeting with them and show them the ropes.

I Said Yes in Little Ways

Saying yes isn't usually a problem for many of us in libraries (unless saying yes IS the problem!). Some of us have taken an oath to try to say "no" more often, in fact. But getting involved in MLA doesn't have to be something big at the start. The first time I helped with something at MLA, I was a room host at a non-conference program. I was already planning to attend for CEUs, so I stood in front of everyone and read the bio of the presenter, made sure the room was set up and broken down, and told them about the Children's Services Division. Then I realized, "Hey, I could be a presenter at one of these trainings." And I did! And then next, I found myself helping plan Kids Are Customers, Too. But it

started very, very small. If you've been finding yourself attending meetings and looking for ways to get more involved, start with a small "yes."

Network

I know, I know—such a corporate-sounding suggestion. But it's true! Talk to people you see at unit meetings, trainings, and conferences. Get to know them. Ask them how they got involved and how you can get involved, too. Aside from my connection with Amanda Roberson, I got to know other folks at MLA who helped plug me in to other unit types that I hadn't considered before. I joined task forces and committees, then eventually ran for Secretary. Networking helped me make those connections and get to know people from across libraries in Maryland.

But Why?

Obviously, I'm coming from a place of wanting to see MLA succeed. But ultimately, MLA is only here to see you succeed in serving the people of Maryland through your role in libraries. So why get involved? Because you can:

- 🧠 Develop your workplace skills by learning from others
- 🧠 Share your expertise and unique ideas to help others develop
- 🧠 Help improve your library by bringing those ideas back to your workplace
- 🧠 Build your leadership skills and resume for personal career succession planning

If you want to talk more about how you can get involved at MLA, I'd like to be the one to invite you. Reach out through MLA Connect—let me know what you're hoping to do and I will help get you plugged in.

Thanks, as always, for everything you do every day for your library and community! ■

Report from MLA's ALA Chapter Councilor

Joseph Thompson, Carroll County Public Library

Back in the winter issue of *the Crab*, I covered the actions that took place during the American Library Association (ALA) Council meetings from January 21-28. As it turned out, there was so much business to accomplish that we couldn't get it all done during those three meetings! Consequently, an additional Zoom meeting was scheduled for March 10. This is a summary of that one meeting. If you're an ALA member, I encourage you to review [the Council documents](#).

ALA Vice President Maria McCauley presided over this meeting. The first topic requiring action involved a report from the Policy Monitoring Committee. The committee moved to adopt a Dissolutions Policy. I voted yes. The motion carried and the policy was approved. It will be added to the ALA Policy Manual.

Next, there were two resolutions that had been carried forward from the January meetings. The first was a "Resolution to Support and Commend the Work of Librarians and Institutions Preserving Government Information since January 21, 2025." There was a proposed amendment to add the word "Archivists" to the title; I voted yes. The amendment passed unanimously. Then, another amendment was proposed to change the language of Resolved Clause #2 to read, "...all entities and organizations that vote or steward government information." I voted no, seeing the statement as overly broad and an action that ALA would not reasonably be able to accomplish, yet the motion passed with all other councilors voting yes (this was a first in my two and a half years on Council!). I offered amendments myself, which were informed by my previous experience chairing the ALA Committee on Legislation. These changes were to remove some language in the Resolved clauses. I voted yes and the motion carried. There was then a vote on the full resolution; I again voted yes, and the motion carried. The amended resolution was approved.

The second resolution was to accept "The Librarian and Library Workers' Bill of Rights." One minor change was proposed to a Whereas clause; I voted yes and the motion carried. However, there was then a large group of very substantial changes proposed by another councilor. More time was needed to consider these additional proposed changes, so a motion was offered to postpone voting on this resolution entirely until the ALA Annual



Conference this June. I voted yes and this motion passed. This will come back up at the Chicago meetings.

Council then entered closed session (current Councilors only) to consider ALA Honorary Membership Nominations. This is ALA's highest honor. As of my writing of this report (March 31), the recipients of these Honorary Memberships have been publicly announced. I voted yes on both and both carried unanimously. The two 2026 recipients are former ALA President Barbara J. Ford and Acting Librarian of Congress Robert R. Newlen. Both will receive lifetime memberships and be recognized at the ALA Annual Conference this June in Chicago.

As always, please don't hesitate to reach out if I can provide any additional information on any of these Council actions, or if you just have an interest in getting involved in ALA! ■



Citizens for Maryland
LIBRARIES



MARYLAND
LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Become a Maryland Library Advocate!

Congratulations to the 2026 winners of the Maryland Library Association Awards!

Catherine Hollerbach, Anne Arundel County Public Library

Libraries Change Communities Award

The winner of this year's award is the Biblio Consulta Team from Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS). Team members include Ann McIntire, Ana Martinez, Efi Asaha, Paul Morena, Giovanna Sandoval, Dan Ramirez, Nancy Coleman, Yolanda Carino, Magali Pena Cabello, Norman Lezama, Yesenia Gutierrez, Vilma Diaz, Idalis Mendoza-Bustos, Nelly Rosales-Mendez, Heather Jackson, Claudia Parra-Acevedo, Jomari Davis, Diana Villatoro, Belmar Sorto, and David Villeda.

Biblio Consulta is a free one-on-one reference telephone service that connects the library's Spanish-speaking customers directly to Spanish-speaking staff members. This team transitioned the system's Ask-a-Librarian call center reference service to direct branch phone lines for English-language service, and to a dedicated Biblio Consulta line for Spanish-language inquiries. The Biblio Consulta team developed the service's evolution, with Information Services Supervisor Ann McIntire leading branch staff, the Information Services team, and the IT and Communications Departments in the many steps needed to update all reference contact information, test new phone and voicemail connections, record new automated messages about Biblio Consulta in Spanish, and develop a suite of new branding to accompany the public launch of Biblio Consulta as a standalone service. The

work of the Biblio Consulta team demonstrates the organization's commitment to meeting its community where it is.

Margaret Carty Emerging Leader Award

This year's winner is Nicole Hance of St. Mary's County Library.

Nicole is being acknowledged for doing an extraordinary job of connecting her passion for sustainability and community education to library work. She has created new partnerships with the local community garden, Health Department, Master Gardeners, Maryland Extension, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, and many more. She started a yearly Sustainability Fair with community partners, bringing information and activities around environmental topics. Nicole advocates within the library for implementing easy sustainability practices. She initiated and chairs the Sustainability Interest Group for MLA and serves as vice chair of St. Mary County Government's Commission on the Environment. She also chairs the seed library initiative for St. Mary's County Library and has led the team implementing PLA's DigitalLearn classes and World on the Move exhibit from ALA.

Honorary Membership Award

This year's winner is John Taube. John was the Director of Allegany County Library System from 2000 – 2025. Under his direction, Allegany County saw the renovation of the Washington Street Library in Cumberland (2005), the Westernport Library in 2008, the South Cumberland Library in 2017, and the LaVale Library in 2022. He also facilitated the transition of all of Allegany County's branches to fiber connections, replacing unreliable wireless connections and vastly improving customer service. John also created the StoryCorp, a centralized children's department that focused on community and

school outreach. With a more outward focus, ACLS saw a dramatic increase in programs and program attendance. During the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Allegany County Library System gave their bookmobile to the devastated Hancock County Library System on the gulf coast of Mississippi. In cooperation with the Maryland Library Association and the Maryland library community, the bookmobile was fully stocked with new books, computers, and other necessities to restore library service to this community.

Outstanding Member Award

This year's winner is Karen Earp of Wicomico Public Library (WPL). Karen is the WPL's Youth Services Manager. Her storybook program in collaboration with the local jail connects inmates with their children and grandchildren through recorded storybooks. Karen's dedication ensures that children maintain bonds with their incarcerated parents, while also expanding access to information for a marginalized population. This program has garnered strong community feedback and is now being expanded to other counties through state funding, an example of how Karen's work resonates beyond her immediate community. Since becoming MLA's Youth Services Division (YSD) Secretary in 2020, Karen has consistently contributed to MLA initiatives, including the annual conference, Kids Are Customers Too, Tech Connect, Teen Connect, and the YSD Annual Book Study. She is always willing to present training or participate in new initiatives, demonstrating a tireless commitment to supporting MLA and its members.

Outstanding Support Staff Award

This year's winner is Maria Jacob of Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL).

Maria is the Circulation Services Manager of

the North Point Branch. Maria's Branch Manager describes her as a true partner in managing the branch. Maria regularly looks for opportunities to develop her staff and encourages participation in MLA. Along with a fellow Circulation Services Manager, Maria was instrumental in creating and presenting training on the LEAP Circulation platform to hundreds of staff members across BCPL. Maria also had a key role in creating the LEAP Resources document all BCPL branch staff use.

Maria is a long-time active MLA member and is currently the President of the MLA Support Staff Division (SSD) after having served as Vice-President/President-Elect of SSD last year. She has previously served as Secretary of SSD and as both President and Vice-President/President-Elect of the Leadership Development Division. Maria has also presented at the MLA/DLA Annual Conference and served on the Annual Conference Committee several times. During this past year Maria was instrumental in updating the officer job descriptions for SSD. She also represented SSD on a panel at the Statewide Circulation Conference at SLRC.

Outstanding Volunteer Award

This year's winner is Susan Klise. Susan is the President of the Friends of the Dorchester County Public Library. Under Susan's leadership, the Friends group has advanced library access and programming in one of Maryland's most underserved counties. Susan brought renewed energy and vision to the Friends group when she stepped into the role of President in Spring 2021. In the wake of the pandemic, Klise rallied a dedicated team of new and returning members, transforming the organization into a vibrant, effective force for literacy and community engagement. Through membership drives, book sales, and generous donations—as well as Klise's own expertise in grant writing—the Friends have significantly enhanced

the library's services and impact.

In 2025, the Friends raised and donated \$12,000 for the Summer Reading Program. Their support led to 1,111 participants, which includes an 87% surge in child and teen signups through partnerships with local daycares and camps. Every participant received a free book, and the library delivered 118 programs, 49 special guest events, and welcomed 4,539 attendees. President Klise personally secured \$2,000 from the Dollar General Community Grant for summer STEM programming and led a successful mail campaign that brought in \$30,000 in additional funding for future initiatives. The Friends' forward-thinking approach included the creation of an official Library Naming and Gifts Policy now used to cultivate major donors and sustain future giving. Thanks to Klise's leadership and the tireless work of the entire group, the library has emerged stronger, more accessible, and more connected to the community than ever.

Project of the Year Award

This year's winner is the Therapy Through Art program, run by Area Director Heather Jackson and Hyattsville Library Branch Manager Dan Ramirez, both of Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS). Funded through an Urban Libraries Council grant geared towards supporting PGCMLS' programming for "emerging adults" (ages 16-21), the program was hosted by the Hyattsville Library and designed to give young people in Prince George's County the opportunity to get free professional-level art instruction in an atmosphere that cultivates emotional support, camaraderie, and mutual respect. Atiya Kingsland and Daphne Jackson, two Therapy Through Art participants, subsequently led a month-long art class with senior citizens at a senior living apartment complex. Heather Jackson facilitated this project by partnering with the City of Hyattsville's senior coordinator

for this program, with the city providing food for each session, PGCMLS providing the art supplies, and the two local teens, Atiya and Daphne, doing the instruction. The follow-up program was a tremendous intergenerational success and demonstrates the wider community impact that Heather and Dan aim to facilitate with PGCMLS' growing "emerging adult" programming.

All of the MLA awards will be distributed to the recipients at the MLA conference in May.

A big thank you to this year's Awards committee:

- Mary Anne Bowman (St. Mary's County Library)
- Lloyd Jansen (Charles County Public Library)
- Ann McIntire (Prince George's County Memorial Library System)
- Cindy Steinhoff (Anne Arundel Community College Library)
- Janet Salazar (Queen Anne's County Library)
- Catherine Hollerbach (Chair – Anne Arundel County Public Library)
- David Dahl (Maryland Library Association President/University of Maryland Libraries)
- Joshua Stone (Maryland Library Association)
- Conni Strittmatter (Maryland Library Association Vice President/Baltimore County Public Library)

Announcing the 2026 One Maryland One Book

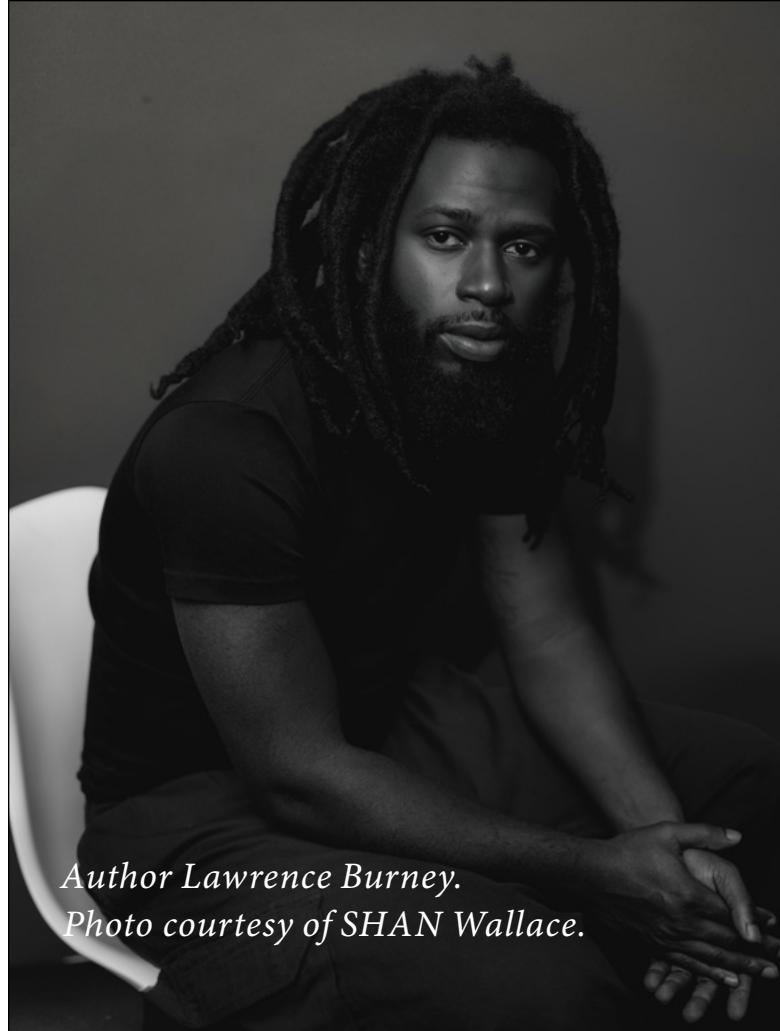
Aditya Desai, Maryland Humanities

Maryland Humanities is pleased to announce that the selection for the 2026 One Maryland One Book (OMOB) is *No Sense in Wishing* by Lawrence Burney. Released in 2025 by Simon and Schuster, the book is a personal and analytical essay collection taking cue from Burney's career as a culture writer and critic, through which he looks at his home city of Baltimore, music from throughout the global Black diaspora, and the traditions that raised him.

On hearing he was selected, Lawrence Burney said, "As a Baltimore native who has spent over a decade critically engaging with cultural production from the entire Chesapeake region, being selected for One Maryland One Book is of the highest honor."

Burney cites inspiration for the book such as the music artists he's grown up with and listened to throughout his life, which he sees as ways to become familiar with the unfamiliar—the cities and regions they come from, the loves and pains they've experienced, and the aspirations and insecurities that live within them. "All of those factors," he says, "create an opportunity for connection—a chance that the artist's storytelling was so effective it inspired you to revisit some of your own experiences with a sense of clarity." To him, *No Sense In Wishing's* mission is to advocate spending ample time with what captures your affection and curiosity.

Through each essay, readers are invited to traverse not only Burney's own journeys across the world, but also consider their own through the music, art, and culture they've encountered. Maryland Humanities highlights



*Author Lawrence Burney.
Photo courtesy of SHAN Wallace.*

how *No Sense in Wishing* shows us, through the words of a local author, how these encounters can help us tap into deeper discussions of cultural background, social histories, adolescence, family, and relationships. Readers are encouraged to see the book as a model for how creative nonfiction and cultural criticism can be a tool for self-exploration and social transformation.

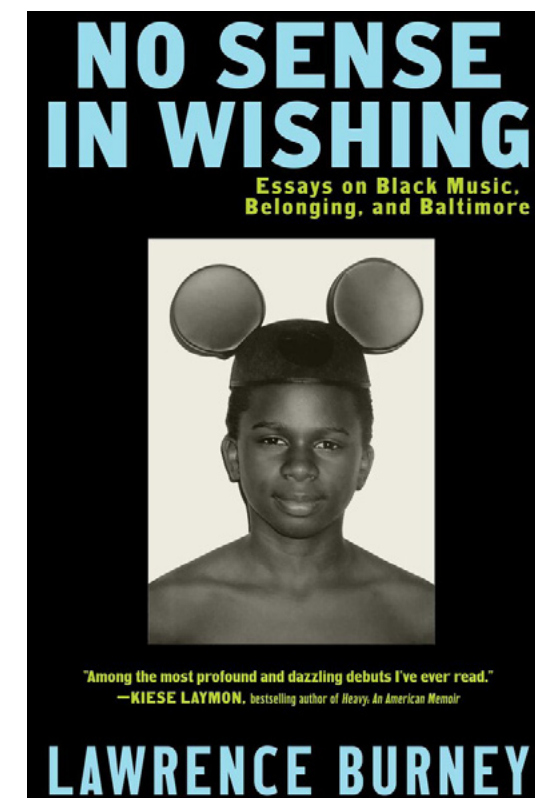
No Sense in Wishing was selected under the 2026 theme of "Revolution, Reaction, Reform," by a Selection Committee of literary professionals, educators, and cultural workers from across the state. In the year of the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, they sought stories of ideas, actions, or events that inspire change—political, historical, economic, and/or social. These changes can be small or large in their moment but have far-reaching impacts throughout time. The domino effect of a single event allows us to better understand how we are, and how

it impacts across Maryland's communities.

"I'd like it to help folks connect the dots," Burney says. "between the sociopolitical factors of their hometowns—or any town—and how music from that place's most oppressed communities emerged. I'd like for our regional food cultures to open discussions about Antebellum society. And I'd like to emphasize how any form of creative expression can challenge power structures."

No Sense in Wishing was selected from a top three list, which included *Silenced Voices* by Pablo Leon, a graphic memoir about the Langley Park native's familial connection to the Guatemalan Civil War, and *Claire McCardell: The Designer Who Set Women Free* by Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson, a biography of the Frederick-born fashion icon.

Maryland Humanities invites readers and organizational partners to join us in another year celebrating the joy of reading and shared learning experiences. Audiences are invited to hear Lawrence Burney speak at events across the state later this year. ■



Andie Craley Appointed to the Depository Library Council

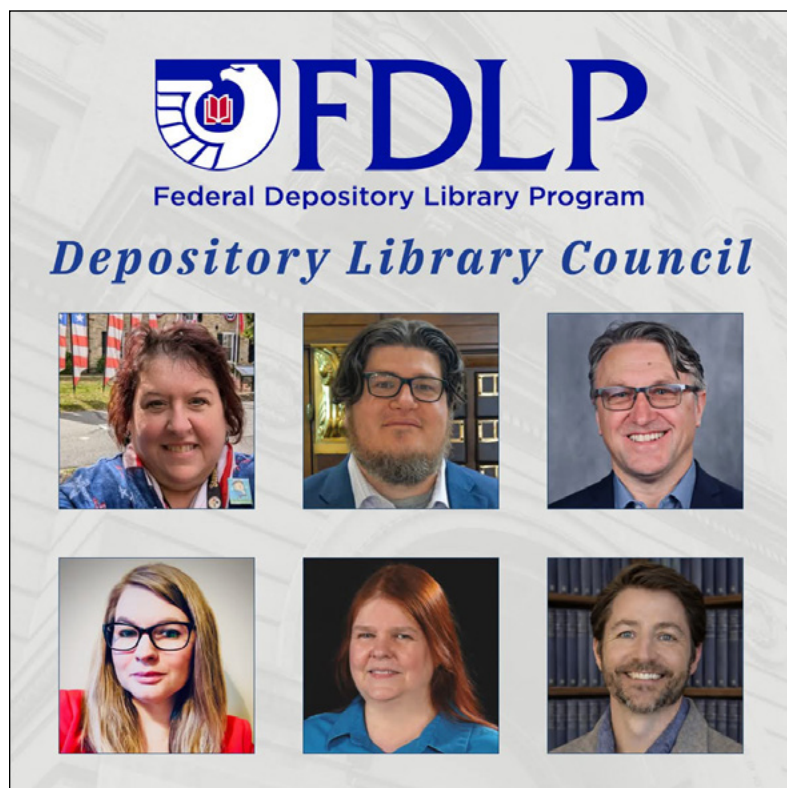
Andie Craley, Technical Services & Government Information Librarian and FDLP Depository Library Coordinator for Harford Community College Library, was appointed as one of six new members to the Depository Library Council (DLC) by the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) Director Hugh Halpern on March 4.

As a national advisory committee, the DLC is made up of 15 members with experience working with government information in tangible and electronic formats in various types of libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). The DLC advises the GPO Director on



policy matters and trends to help advance GPO's vision of an America Informed. Andie will begin serving her three-year term on June 1, 2026, as a representative from HCC Library and the MD/DC/DE region to help give a voice for community colleges. Her nomination was endorsed by the Government Documents Round Table of the American Library Association.

For more information on the Depository Library Council, [see their webpage](#), which will be updated with the new members when they start their term in June 2026. Harford Community College Library was congressionally designated into the Federal Depository Library Program on June 1, 1967, and will celebrate its 60th FDLP anniversary in 2027. Harford Community College Library was named 2024 Depository Library of the Year by the GPO. ■



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MARYLAND STATE
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Highlights from the Winter 2026 Maryland State Library Resource Center Public Services Conference

Beyond the Desk

Strengthening Service + Self

Paul Chasen, Enoch Pratt Free Library/Maryland State Library Resource Center

Photographs courtesy of John Cassini, Enoch Pratt Free Library/Maryland State Library Resource Center

ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24 (VIRTUAL DAY) AND WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25 (in-person day), Maryland library workers gathered to learn how to enhance and improve public services, while also gaining ample opportunities to incorporate healthy practices into their everyday lives. The virtual day began with a focus on health, featuring keynote speaker Loida Garcia-Febo, International Library Consultant and Past President, American Library Association (ALA), who presented a keynote focused on wellness and balance in public service. Next, Tif Sutherland, Calvert Library, Past President of the Maryland Library Association (MLA), highlighted the importance of the [Maryland Library Helpline](#) for intellectual freedom. The virtual day concluded with a sneak peek into how the statewide interlibrary loan service, [Marina](#), will be better than ever with new software and more online features. Approximately 130 library workers attended all or some of the virtual day.

The in-person day began with State Librarian Morgan Lehr Miller, who encouraged the 130 library workers in attendance to remain in the profession long-term, with healthy and realistic expectations and strong managerial support. Attendees were then able to participate in activities that got them creating or moving (i.e., printmaking, tours, tai chi and qigong) and training sessions that helped them think critically about front-line public service (i.e., The NeuroMagic of Customer Service, Setting Boundaries, and Beyond Books: Empowering Public Librarians to Advocate for Unhoused Patrons). We had speakers from

multiple libraries, organizations, and local businesses provide their expertise to help us further develop personally and professionally.

Praise from our attendees includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Virtual Day

Keynote address provided much appreciated information for micro actions that make a macro difference.

Tif's presentation was totally awesome!!!

I really enjoyed the Maryland Intellectual Freedom Helpline workshop. It was very engaging and it was great to know that data is being collected! I didn't know about the helpline before, so I now feel empowered to report what I see.

Workshops were extremely informative and helped my general knowledge.

I supervise the head of ILL and occasionally help out, so the ILL demo was an excellent preview of what's to come. I'm excited to see progress.

Thank you for continuing to offer virtual sessions for people who may not be able to make it in person!

I always love the SLRC training days. I can't always make the in-person days, but the virtual ones are a great day of learning (and CEUs).

In-Person Day

The State Librarian's message was so good to hear. She said, "I'm not talking about the budget, buildings, capital projects . . . today is about you." It felt so good that public service was recognized as hard work; that our jobs every day are not just standing at

a desk or shelving books. It meant a lot to hear this coming from someone at the top, and to be appreciated.

The NeuroMagic of Customer Service had a lot of great information that I will use in the library and at home with my kids!

Best session was the Budgeting & Investing. Please bring him back for other conferences; his sessions could've been longer!

Impressive presenters prepared with good information, especially We Keep Us Safe with Mariel Sass, but I found all the sessions I attended worthwhile.

Amazing collaboration, wonderful program ideas, great conversation with others from many libraries and how they do their jobs.

This was my first year attending, and it was a very fun experience. I learned many things to apply in the future.

This has been my favorite SLRC conference so far. It was more engaging and hands-on than usual, and I really had a great time. I also want to thank you for how much of the sessions included ways that we can take care of our mental health. Everything from the opening session to the maker-gear sessions. It felt like a conference/staff appreciation.

More information about the Winter 2026 Maryland State Library Resource Center (SLRC) Public Services Conference is available [on our website](#). Please be on the lookout for more opportunities to attend SLRC conferences and training sessions in the Professional Development menu [of our website](#). ■

Continue on for a gallery of photos from the conference!



Morgan Lehr Miller, State Librarian, Maryland State Library Agency and the in-person, keynote speaker, presented “Beyond Resilience: Making Public Library Work Sustainable in Maryland.”



Three Maryland public libraries have DEI officers, and they were all on stage. They provided a fulfilling and insightful discussion, moderated by the Central Library/SLRC Circulation Manager, Lois Mayo-Dickey. The panelists were Cassandra Miller, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, Baltimore County Public Library; Dr. Kelly Clark, Chief Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging Officer, Howard County Library System, and Dr. Emil L. Cunningham, Executive Director, Office of Equity and Fair Practice, Enoch Pratt Free Library.



◆ A packed Poe Room audience learned more about “The Changing Landscape of Interlibrary Loan in Maryland” from Paula Maciel, Operations Manager, Collections and Access Services Division (CASD), Enoch Pratt Free Library; Emma Beaven, Manager, Maryland Interlibrary Loan Organization (MILO), Enoch Pratt Free Library; Hannah Brady, Office Supervisor, Maryland Interlibrary Loan Organization (MILO), Enoch Pratt Free Library; and Debbie Hensler, Customer Success Manager, Auto-Graphics, a Soutron Global Company.



◆ Baba Ausar Winkler, Founder, TNAT Holistic Wellness Center, leads conference attendees in a Tai Chi and Qigong session in the Children’s Department Day Room at the Central Library.



◆ Melisa Mitchell, Founder, The Space Within, leads a meditation session in the Children’s Department Night Room in the Central Library.

More than Yarn

Crafting a Community, One Stitch at a Time


Ashley Littleton and Natalia Seiden, Charles County Public Library

Photos courtesy of Charles County Public Library staff

AT THE POTOMAC BRANCH OF THE CHARLES COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, Monday evenings are anything but quiet or boring. Laughter fills the room, conversations overlap, and yarn moves from project bags to busy hands. Happy Hour Crochet & Knitting is, at its core, a social gathering, one where creativity and community intertwine.

The program has evolved over the past decade, beginning as a small crochet and knitting group and later revived by library staff member Natalia Seiden. Inspired by a mother-daughter pair who had previously attended the program, Natalia recognized the importance of creating space for shared experiences. She reintroduced the group with the goal of offering both creative expression and meaningful connection.

Over time, the program adapted to meet changing needs. During the pandemic, it became one of the library system's early virtual offerings, providing social interaction for individuals who were isolated at home. Many participants, particularly seniors, relied on the program as a consistent point of connection. Today, the group meets weekly in a hybrid format, blending in-person and virtual participation. This flexibility allows individuals to join from wherever they are, whether from the branch or the comfort of their home.



Happy Hour Crochet & Knitting is a weekly hybrid program at the Potomac Branch, welcoming participants of all skill levels to craft, learn, and connect.

happy hour crochet & knitting

At one point, the program even welcomed a participant joining from Cairo, Egypt, highlighting the unexpected reach of its virtual format.

Participants represent a wide range of ages and experience levels. Beginners sit alongside seasoned crafters, and learning happens organically through shared practice. Some learn from family members, others from books, classes, or online tutorials. Regardless of background, everyone is welcome. As Natalia describes it, "It doesn't matter how you learn, just that you try."

The group's appeal lies in its informality and inclusiveness. Participants bring their own projects, share techniques, and jump in to help one another troubleshoot patterns or stitches. "The room feels like chaos," Natalia shares, "but in the best way." Conversations span everything from crafting techniques to everyday life, creating an environment where regular attendees become more like family.

That sense of community extends beyond the group itself. A local resident who had previously donated yarn asked if the group would be interested in creating hats for a church-run homeless outreach program. What began as a small idea quickly grew. One group member was already connected to the same church and helped coordinate donations, while others eagerly joined in.

Since 2020, the group has donated 289 hats, along with scarves, blankets, and gloves, to local organizations like Faith UMC Homeless Mission and Lifestyles of Southern Maryland. Additional blankets have been donated to Project Linus, which provides homemade items to children experiencing illness or trauma.

For participants, the opportunity to give back has added deeper meaning to their craft. "You can only keep so many items for yourself or your family," Natalia explains. "We consider it a privilege to have a place where our donated items are truly valued and used." Donations are entirely voluntary, and members participate as they feel inspired, reinforcing the program's low-pressure, welcoming environment. Feedback from partner organizations has affirmed the impact of their work.

The hybrid format has also expanded accessibility. Participants can join from home when health, transportation, or weather present barriers, while remaining connected to

the group. Whether attending from the meeting room or from the comfort of their couch, members can share their work, ask for help, and stay engaged.

Moments of spontaneity and joy are an intrinsic part of the program's charm. On one occasion, multiple participants unknowingly created the same project at the same time, leading to laughter and a shared decision to try future group projects together. In another instance, Natalia came across a social media post in which a stranger recommended the library's program to someone looking to learn to crochet. "That was a proud moment," she says. "It meant the group had become something that people talk about."

Happy Hour Crochet & Knitting demonstrates how libraries can create spaces that go beyond traditional programming. By combining creativity, accessibility, and community engagement, the program offers participants not only a place to craft but also a place to belong. As the group looks ahead, its members remain committed to continuing their service efforts and supporting their community, one stitch at a time.

Tips for Running a Hybrid Craft Program

- 🧶 Keep the structure flexible to allow conversation and creativity
- 🧶 Encourage peer learning rather than formal instruction
- 🧶 Use simple, reliable technology and be prepared for sound challenges
- 🧶 Create opportunities for both social interaction and skill-building
- 🧶 Consider service projects to deepen engagement and community impact
- 🧶 Emphasize accessibility so participants can join from home when needed

Even the unofficial mascots of the Potomac Branch Children's Area get in on the fun, modeling handmade hats created by Happy Hour Crochet & Knitting participants. ▣

Handmade hats created by participants in Happy Hour Crochet & Knitting and donated to local outreach organizations, including Faith UMC Homeless Mission and Lifestyles of Southern Maryland. ◆



School Field Trips to the Library



Debra Capponi, Prince George's County Memorial Library System

LIBRARY STAFF are accustomed to visiting schools—career days, back-to-school nights, PTO meetings—the list is long. And many libraries welcome classes to their buildings.

Bladensburg Branch of Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) enjoys strong relationships with the schools in our area. Over 100 students and faculty, representing three local schools, showed up and supported the library at our re-opening ceremony two years ago. Since then, we have hosted teacher meetings and trainings in our new space, and we have conducted oral history interviews with high school faculty members. However, our biggest collaboration to date is welcoming the entire student body of Bladensburg Elementary School (BES) which is located two blocks from our building.

Dr. Jamon Liburd, Vice Principal of BES, introduced the idea of a field trip during a conversation more than a year before we welcomed the first group of students. We had often discussed smaller field trips to the branch, but when he asked formally to make it a school-wide affair at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, we decided to go for it. We continue to host large school field trips which we believe are well worth the effort.

Planning

Bladensburg Branch is not a large facility, and we knew we could not accommodate all the students at once. Instead, each grade (Pre-K through fifth) visited on a different day. First through fifth grade visits took place across four weeks in the fall of 2024. Pre-K and Kindergarten—and the second grade from a different school—visited in the spring of 2025. We conducted another first grade field trip this past fall and a second grade trip in February, and we have plans for six more visits this spring.

Every person working in a public library can probably come up with reasons not to commit to hosting field trips of 100+ elementary students. My goal is to demonstrate why—and how—you can and maybe should!

All ten field trips shared the same framework, though the specific “rotations” within the framework varied according to the grade level of the students and the library colleagues participating on the day of the particular visit.

“Rotations” refer to the different activities we prepared for the students. As

noted, we could not host all grades at the same time. Similarly, our facility is too small to accommodate 100+ students in one space at one time, so library colleagues volunteered to lead different activities in designated areas. We divided the students into four groups, and each group rotated through the activities. For example, while Marcus led a scavenger hunt on the main floor, Nancy led a bookmark-making activity in the meeting room.

Again, due to size and staffing, we also could not host over 100 students when the branch was open to the public. All field trips were scheduled on mornings when the branch opened at noon. This meant colleagues participating in each field trip were scheduled to work an early shift. We also solicited help from colleagues at other branches and volunteers who had been vetted to help with children's programs. We had help from at least one colleague or volunteer, including from our supportive Area Director Heather Jackson, for seven of the ten field trips.

A few days before each visit, we shared an electronic document with teachers that covered library basics: the library's contact information, hours of operation, and a reminder that all students have a library LINK account (which is a limited borrowing account that all Prince George's County Public School students receive automatically). The document also included the schedule of the library's recurring programs for elementary students and a few appropriate electronic resources. The goal of the field trips is always to convey the message: “You are welcome here; we want you to use the library's free services and resources.” Any additional details that students and teachers retain we consider a bonus.

3rd Grade (130 students): Wednesday, Nov 5, 2025

10:10-10:30	10:30-10:50	10:50-11:10	11:10-11:30
Meeting Room (Nancy): Mr. A	Meeting Room (Nancy): Dr. D	Meeting Room (Nancy): Ms. C	Meeting Room (Nancy): Ms. B
Activity Room (Traci): Ms. B	Activity Room (Traci): Mr. A	Activity Room (Traci): Dr. D	Activity Room (Traci): Ms. C
Children's (Wilma): Ms. C	Children's (Wilma): Ms. B	Children's (Wilma): Mr. A	Children's (Wilma): Dr. D
Main (Norman) Dr. D	Main (Norman): Ms. C	Main (Norman): Ms. B	Main (Norman): Mr. A

Before each field trip, we distributed to staff a run-of-show document that included a block schedule. This schedule also included notes about the activities each colleague would lead and about transitions between rotations: traffic flow, who escorts the students to the next activity, and who announces over the PA that it's time to move to the next activity.

It is important to plan the transitions.

Tips from Lessons Learned

First tip: Refrain from scheduling more than two field trips in one month, and refrain from scheduling more than one per week! Even though no employee (other than myself) participated in all the field trips, hosting affects the whole branch: from setup, to cleanup, to preparing to open the branch immediately after students leave. Though I think the field trips are in some ways exhilarating for all of us, I also think we were all spent by the end of the month when we hosted five of them.

Second tip: Ask for help. You probably know colleagues at other branches who enjoy working with elementary students and are very good at it. Extra hands help you, and the field trip offers those extra hands an opportunity to visit another branch and create something with colleagues they do not work with every day.

Third tip: Initially, we scheduled field trips to last two hours, and to end just before we opened to the public. (Yes, I was foolish.) While the older students stayed engaged during the entire two-hour visit, one and a half hours is better for everyone participating: students and library staff. Shorter rotations meant we had to plan something quick and focused, but that was a fun challenge to keep things moving and exciting! For the remaining field trips this year, we have made another adjustment; students will rotate through three (rather

than four) stations. While it means more students in each rotation, logistics are simpler, and none of the groups will be any larger than the largest groups we have already hosted.

Fourth tip: Plan for the field trip but know that it will not all go according to plan. That's okay. You and your colleagues are professionals, and you will make it work—and laugh while doing so.

Payoff

Anecdotally, we have many reasons to say the effort is worth it. The school (correctly) thinks we're great, and that has led to an even deeper relationship with school leaders and teachers. It has also led to a deeper relationship with the school community as a whole. For example, one father brought his daughter to the library before her class visited so she would know what to expect. Both the student and father became regulars.

Countless students who visit the library after their field trip announce to us that they are back. They recognize us, they introduce us to their families, and they introduce their families to the library space. They feel comfortable here.

Whenever we visit schools that have taken field trips to the branch, many students greet us and tell us that they know us. They remember the library positively even if they have not yet returned for another visit. Their memory of the library is not something that we can create by telling them about the library during a school visit; they have experienced it themselves.

Are you thinking about trying to welcome an entire school (or more) to your library? I encourage you to go for it, and I invite you to ask questions if you would like to know more about our experience.

Want to get more involved with MLA? Check out some of our Caucuses, Divisions, Committees, and Interest Groups!

CAUCUS

Black Caucus of the Maryland Library Association (BCMLA)

DIVISIONS

Adult Services and Reference Division
Association of College and Research Libraries, MD
Leadership Development Division
Support Staff Division
Youth Services Division

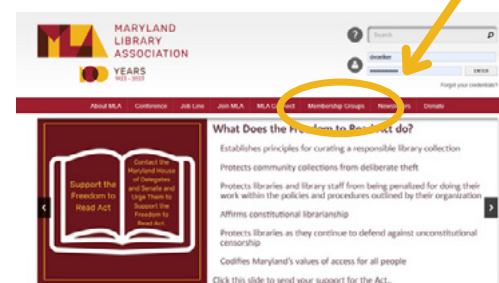
COMMITTEES & PANELS

Awards Committee
Intellectual Freedom Panel
Legislative Panel
Marketing Committee
Maryland Author Award Committee
Professional Development Panel

INTEREST GROUPS

Emerging Adults Interest Group
Future of Libraries Interest Group
LGBTQ+ Interest Group
Library Advocacy Interest Group
Maryland Adult Programming Interest Group
Materials Interest Group
Outreach Services Interest Group
Readers' Advisory Interest Group
Sustainability Interest Group
Technical Services Interest Group
Teen Interest Group

With your MLA membership, you can join our groups at any time on the MLA website or by emailing mla@mdlib.org.



OutRAIGeous Reviews

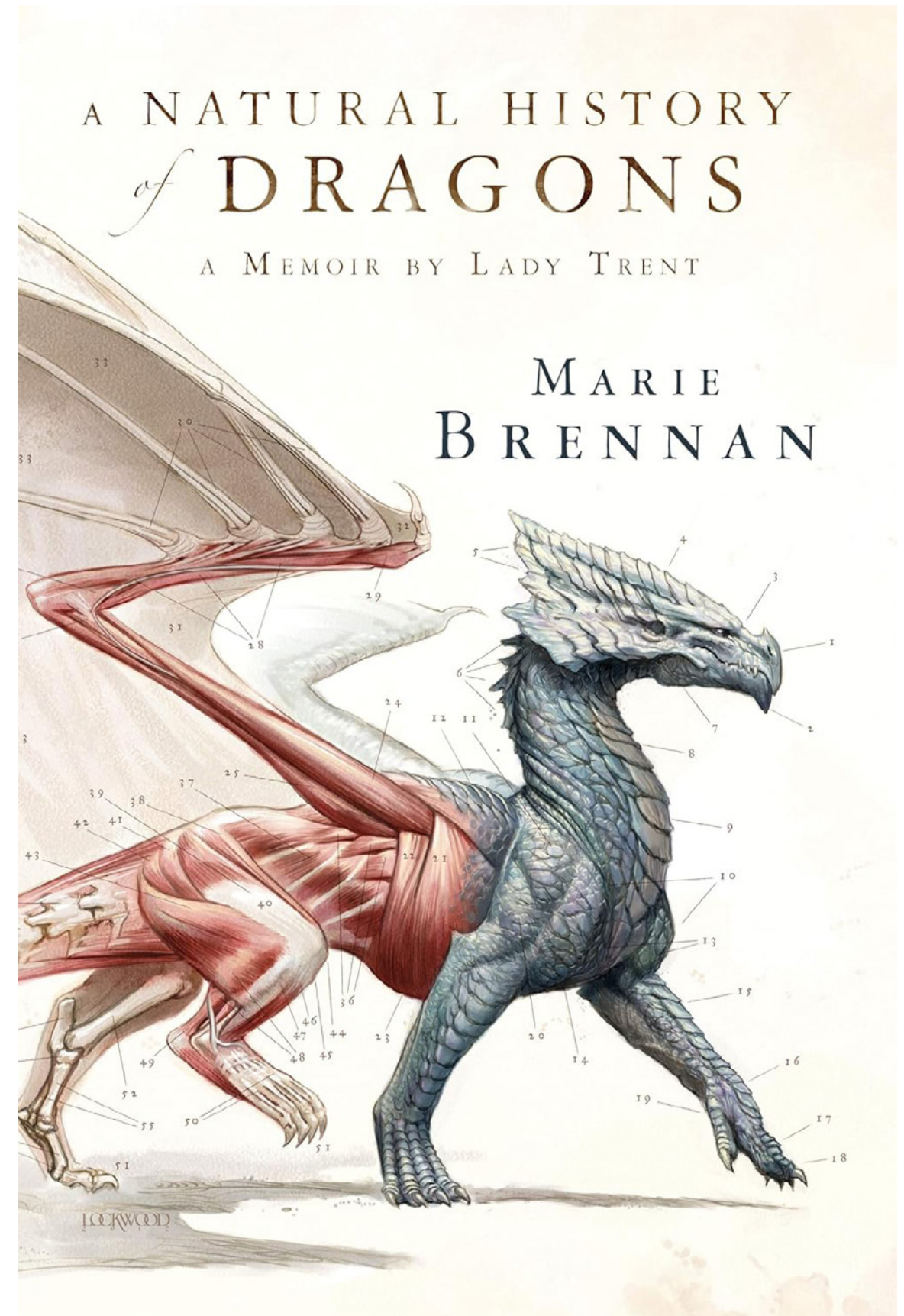
*Books recommended by members of
the Reader's Advisory Interest Group*

***A Natural History of Dragons* (Lady Trent Memoirs #1) by
Marie Brennan (Tor, 2013)**

Review by August Campbell

This is a fantasy novel that reads like a Victorian-era memoir. We have Isabella, Lady Trent, telling in her own words how she came to be one of the most notorious dragon researchers in Scirland. Throughout the series she has many adventures in different environments, countries, and continents. In this installment, readers meet Isabella, who from a young age has been in love with anything with wings (especially dragons). We join her on her journey to prove to the world that women are just as capable as any man, and occasionally better suited for the task. Adventuring from Scirland to the mountains of Vystrana, Isabella and her fellow researchers will face many potential dangers from inhospitable locals, sabotaging competitors, smugglers, cult followers, and of course, huge dragons.

This title will appeal to fans of Rebecca Thorne and *Emily Wilde's Encyclopedia of Faeries* by Heather Fawcett.

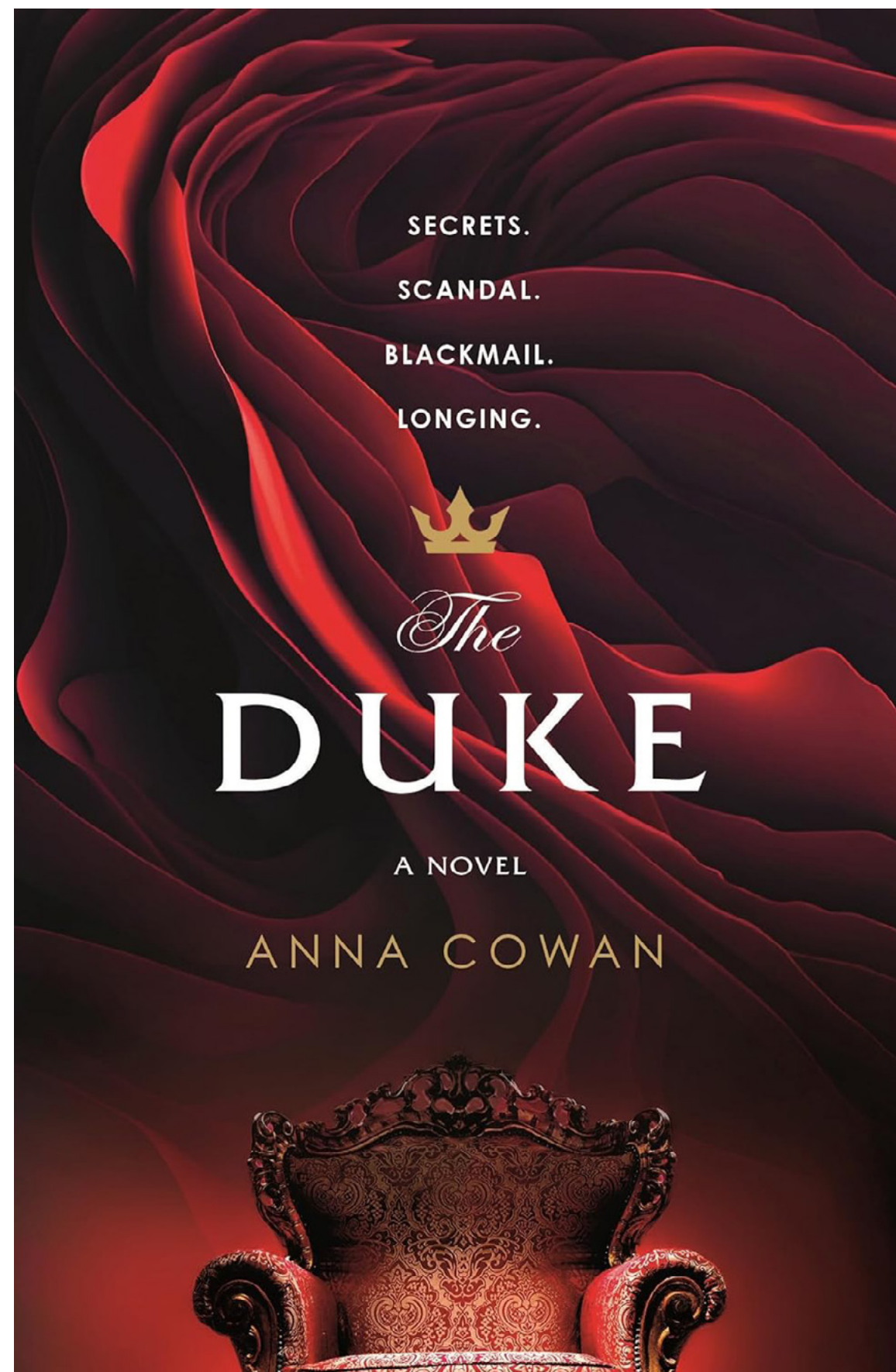


***The Duke* by Anna Cowan (St. Martin's Griffin, 2026)**

Review by Teresa Miller

Celine is a courtesan. Kate is a duke with a ruthless reputation. They share one passionate night - then Kate abandons Celine to the mercies of the French Revolution. Three years later Celine appears in London, blackmailing Kate into providing her with a secure future. They hate each other, but neither woman understands the circumstances, regrets, and passions that have driven the other to this point. And neither one can forget that night in Paris...

This was such a satisfying historical romance. The political intrigue, the tension between Kate and Celine, and their individual character development all relied on each other and grew together to create a wonderful reading experience. Both leads are morally gray in a way that is believable and sympathetic, which is exactly how I like my enemies-to-lovers. Their journeys of discovering each other, understanding themselves, and reconciling their feelings with the challenges between them were distinct and moving for each woman, but perfectly balanced with each other. And the yearning! I expected to enjoy this book based on the description, but I was completely swept away by the beautiful characters and skillful storytelling. This was also my first time reading queer-norm historical fiction, and it exceeded my expectations. More Georgian-era lesbians, please! (Especially hot butches riding horses.)

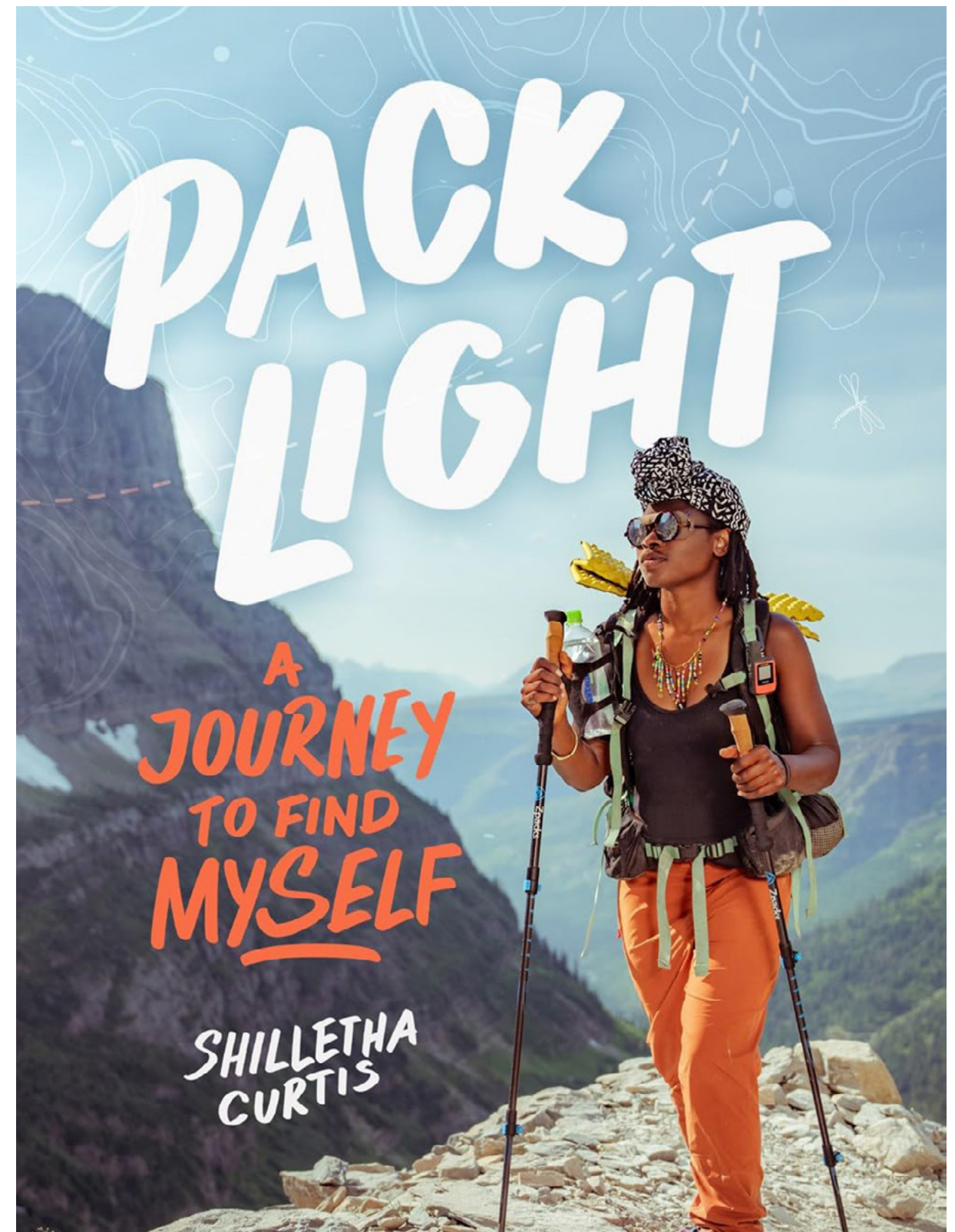


***Pack Light: A Journey to Find Myself* by Shilletha Curtis**
(Andscape Books, 2024)

Review by Monica McAbee

When she lost her job at the start of the Covid pandemic, Shilletha Curtis found that hiking calmed her doubts and alleviated her depression. After learning about the Appalachian Trail, she posted a query to a hikers' group asking about safety issues for Black hikers. Instead of being given encouragement and tips for staying safe, she was castigated for assuming that anyone hiking the trail could possibly be prejudiced. This online display of white fragility bolstered Curtis's determination to become the first Black lesbian to hike the A. T. from end to end (known as "thru-hiking"). Choosing the trail name "Dragonsky," she set out to show that the trail is for everyone.

In *Pack Light*, Curtis relates her arduous thru-hike experience (which did indeed include instances of racism, but also many moments of pure joy), while providing insight into her mental health challenges and the extent to which nature can restore a measure of peace. It's a wonderful story about determination and grit.

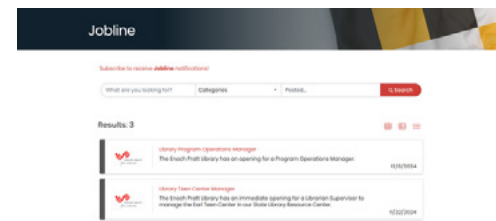


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If you are interested in advertising with the Maryland Library Association, contact Joshua Stone at mlaexec@mdlib.org.



Maryland Library Association's Future of Libraries Interest Group

Meeting Notes

Tracy Miller, Harford County Public Library

The Future of Libraries Interest Group meets monthly to talk about particular issues related to libraries. Members rotate leading the group and will provide a list of resources or other material related to their topic to members who attend. Often those topics are motivated by the intersection of where a member's personal interests connect with their professional interests. That was certainly the case in our January and March meetings, which were led by Paul Chasen, Enoch Pratt Free Library/Maryland State Library Resource Center, and Ann McIntire, Prince George's County Memorial Library System, respectively. Both Paul and Ann were gracious enough to share with me their reasons for choosing their topics, as well as some takeaways from our conversations.

January Meeting, Fitness & Nutrition, Paul Chasen

I chose fitness & nutrition because I think libraries are concertedly seeking partnerships with individuals, organizations, and agencies that have the expertise to present and provide activities on these topics. Libraries are also recognizing that their employees can do more than provide access to information on fitness & nutrition. Employees can develop programs about them, and they know people and groups in their communities who can lead the programs at little to no cost.

Fitness & nutrition are personal interests of mine. I have been a competitive runner since I was 14, but I don't think I took the nutritional part involved in excelling in that sport seriously until I got into my mid-20s. Meat and potatoes and water, and the occasional fruit and vegetable, can only take you so far in that sport.

The conversation went into the types of materials we have or could possibly have on fitness and nutrition in our libraries. Some people in attendance pointed out the challenges

of having materials that cover fitness and nutrition trends or fads that can lead to instant, positive results that impact our wellbeing, and our libraries also have materials that can lead to long-term, positive results.

The conversation also went into what our libraries can potentially do to provide more fitness and nutrition to our libraries' library of things, and expand upon programs that target populations that may not be able to afford gym memberships or different types of food and drink, and did not learn about fitness and nutrition early enough in life.

March Meeting, The Future of Accessibility in Libraries, Ann McIntire

I chose the topic "The Future of Accessibility" partly because it's been increasingly visible in library-world conversations, but it is also near to me personally as the parent of a son with autism. I wanted us to take a look at what's available to improve accessibility now, but also what the future may hold as libraries continue to strive for universal barrier-free access to our services, buildings, and online spaces.

We discussed technological innovations made possible through apps (talking signage, live transcription, augmentative communication and more), options for communication facilitation devices, software like JAWS, Zoomtext, and Fusion, and ensuring ADA-compliant web spaces and online resources so users with screen readers have full access.

We explored moving towards universal physical access in our buildings through design features and providing alternate sensory environments. We also looked at the importance of staff training in improving communication experiences and ensuring universal access in service and program design.

Our discussion benefitted from lively participation overall, and expertise offered by attendees from the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and the State Library Resource Center.

Do you have a topic that you want to talk about?

Join the conversation at the Future of Libraries Interest Group meetings on the first Monday of the month at 10 a.m.!



Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Panel

Word on the Street What Does Belonging Mean for Libraries

Cassandra Miller, Baltimore County Public Library

You have likely heard the term belonging in conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion, but what does it mean, and why is it relevant to library workers?

Belonging is often confused with welcome or inclusion. Both matter, but belonging is something a little different. In a library setting, it means people can walk into the building, ask questions, use services, and participate in programs without feeling like they are inconveniencing anyone or proving they deserve to be there. It means they can be new, confused, uncertain, or in need of help and still feel that the library is a place for them.

For libraries, belonging matters because access alone is not always enough. A customer may be allowed in the building, eligible for a library card, and still leave feeling confused or out of place. Libraries make perfect sense when you already know how they work, but they make much less sense when you do not. A customer may not know how to sign up for a card, use self-checkout, reserve a computer, print a document, register for a program, or even which desk to approach. When those moments go poorly, the message people often receive is “this place was not built with me in mind.”

This is especially relevant when thinking about new American outreach and services. For many new American customers, the library can be an important entry point to information, technology, language learning, and community support. At the same time, many of these customers may not yet see the library as a place meant for them. People may be navigating

language barriers, unfamiliarity with public libraries in the United States, concerns about privacy, uncertainty about what documentation is needed, or discomfort about asking questions when they are not sure how the system works. In those moments, belonging is shaped by what staff do, what information is available, and whether the library feels easy to approach in the first place.

So, what does belonging look like in practice?

1. Customer Service: Help without creating shame.

Belonging is often built or lost at the service desk. A customer who hesitates, looks around, or gives a short answer may not be uninterested. They may be unsure, nervous, or trying to avoid doing something incorrectly. Library workers can make a real difference by slowing down, using plain language, and checking for understanding. For new American customers, this might mean using a Pocketalk instant translation device, calling an interpretation service, or walking through a form step-by-step instead of simply handing it across the desk. More broadly, it means treating confusion as a normal part of using the library rather than as a problem with the customer.

2. Library Spaces and Communication: Reduce hidden barriers.

Belonging is also shaped by what customers see before they ever speak to a staff member. Are signs clear? Are forms easy to follow? Is information available in the languages most commonly spoken in the community? Does the building make it obvious where to go for help? A branch can be warm and well-intentioned and still be hard to navigate. A flyer full of library jargon, a card application with unclear instructions, or a service point that assumes customers already know the process can all quietly communicate that some people are insiders and others are not. Reviewing signage, forms, and public information

through the eyes of a first-time user is one practical way to strengthen belonging.

3. Programs and Outreach:

Show up consistently and build trust over time.

Customers are more likely to feel that they belong when the library shows up consistently and intentionally. That is especially important in outreach to new American communities. If a library offers one program, sees low attendance, and quickly moves on, it may never build the familiarity or trust needed for people to participate. Sometimes belonging starts with consistency. Repeatedly offering conversation groups, citizenship resources, multilingual programs, or community information sessions helps communicate that these services are not temporary and that new American customers are genuinely part of the library's audience.

It also means going where new American communities already are rather than expecting people to find the library on their own. Outreach is often more effective when it happens in places that are already part of people's daily lives, such as schools, community centers, English language classes, faith communities, or neighborhood-based organizations. Libraries can also strengthen outreach by working through trusted institutions, especially the school system, which is often one of the most familiar and credible points of connection for families. When libraries build relationships in these spaces and maintain a visible, reliable presence over time, they make it easier for new American customers to see the library as a place for them.

Belonging gives library workers a useful question to ask: can people use the library with dignity, confidence, and trust? That question matters for new American customers, but it is just as relevant for teens, older adults, people with disabilities, first-time users, and anyone else who may not experience the library as effortlessly as staff sometimes assume. When we pay attention to belonging, we move beyond the idea of being welcoming and look more closely at whether people can actually navigate, use, and return to our spaces.

Do you have a term you'd like us to explore in future columns? Share your suggestions with us! ■

Intellectual Freedom Panel (IFP) News

Lloyd Jansen, Charles County Public Library



Intellectual Freedom Panel

Maryland Intellectual Freedom Round-Up

The Harford County School Board's appeal of the Maryland State Board of Education's vote to overturn the ban of the YA graphic novel *Flamer* by Mike Curato **continues to work its way** through the Harford County Circuit Court. If you recall, the Harford board's decision to ban the book on the grounds of graphic language and vulgarity was made behind closed doors after an internal review committee and the superintendent supported retaining the book, prompting **protests** from parents and educators.

On March 4, MLA issued a **statement** in opposition to H.R. 7661, the "Stop the Sexualization of Children Act". To quote the statement, "MLA urges those concerned about this bill, and who support the freedom to read without interference from politicians, to call their members of Congress at the Capitol switchboard (202-224-3121) and ask them to oppose H.R. 7661."

MLA President David Dahl also sent a **letter** to Dr. Chelsea Brewer, Executive Director, Literacy Programs and Initiatives Branch of the of Maryland State Department of Education, expressing concern over proposed Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) amendments that appear to weaken the requirements for certified library staff in school libraries.

Satvik Jain, Alara Kocoglu, and Angela Yang, tenth grade students at Centennial High School in Ellicott City, won Third Prize (High School—Eastern Division) in the C-SPAN StudentCam 2026 competition for their documentary short, "**Removed: The Past, Present, and Future of Book Censorship in America**". Congratulations to Satvik, Alara, and Angela for this recognition!

My Valentine Wouldn't Ban Books IFP Book Discussion

The IFP held an online banned book discussion via MLA Connect on February 13 where participants spoke briefly about their banned book selections. The group discussed the reasons for the challenges, the locations in which the titles were challenged, and whether the challenges have been struck down or upheld.

Titles discussed were:

- Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison [2018]
- Looking for Alaska* by John Green [2005]
- Madeline and the Gypsies* by Ludwig Bemelmans [1959]
- Most Ardently* by Gabe Cole Nova [2024]

Please stay tuned for further Banned Book discussions! IFP is planning to host a Summer Reading-focused Banned Book Discussion in the midst of the summer.

IFP @MLA

The Panel is sponsoring four great events at the upcoming MLA/DLA conference in May: **Wednesday, May 6, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (Pre-conference): "Using Stories from the Library Community to Build AI Policy" (Tess Wilson of the Library Freedom Project)**

While AI represents potential, it also poses real harm. As information professionals, library workers have a responsibility to understand this technology and the implications of its widespread use. Library Freedom Project will present strategies for those curious about the use of AI in their institution, opportunities to share stories and experiences of

AI, approaches to assessing the privacy risks AI poses for our communities, and resources for continued learning. Participants will work together to build actionable frameworks for analyzing, designing, and implementing AI policies in their libraries that support the values of the communities we serve and of the profession at large.

Thursday, May 7, 10:45-11:45 a.m.: “Practical Intellectual Freedom Strategies for Front Line Workers” (Skip Dye and Rosie Stewart from Penguin Random House)

As book challenges and censorship attempts intensify, library staff at every level—particularly those on the front lines—find themselves navigating increasingly complex conversations about access, diversity, and community values related to library resources. This session moves beyond general overviews of intellectual freedom to focus on practical, actionable strategies for responding to real-world situations while staying true to the ethical foundations of librarianship. Drawing upon resources (United Against Book Bans, PEN America) and advocacy efforts (Authors Against Book Bans, American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom), this program equips participants with tools to confidently, ethically, and effectively address challenges. Through guided discussion, scenario analysis, and reflective dialogue, attendees will explore how to uphold intellectual freedom in both principled and pragmatic ways.

Friday, May 8, 11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m.: “Balancing the Books: Intellectual Freedom in Technical Services and Collection Development” (Kristina Alayan, University of Maryland School of Law; Maggie Saponaro, University of Maryland; Christina Vortia, Howard University)

Who decides what goes on the shelves? This panel explores intellectual freedom in action—covering acquisitions, cataloging, and censorship challenges—and offers strategies to keep libraries open, diverse, and inclusive.

Friday, May 8, 12:30-1:30 p.m.: “Shelf Censorship: Threats to the First Amendment’s Protection of Intellectual Freedom” (Aaron Terr, Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression [FIRE])

Libraries remain an active front in the nation’s culture wars. Over the last few years, state and local governments around the country have sought to narrow the range of ideas available for exploration in these vital democratic spaces. But those on the side of freedom are fighting back—in both the court of law and the court of public opinion. This session will explore the First Amendment’s protection of access to information in public libraries and survey recent censorship trends and legal developments.

SIFnet News

A regular feature of the IFP column is a sampling of intellectual freedom joys and

concerns taken from the monthly State Intellectual Freedom Network (SIFnet) virtual meetings, hosted by the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom. The meetings took place February 18 and March 18.

Connecticut: The state has seen an uptick in school library challenges and has continued issues with school districts not following the Freedom to Read law. Again, this only goes to show that Freedom to Read laws are only effective if they are enforced.

Florida: HB119, which would have blocked schools from considering the literary, artistic, political, or scientific value of books (a key component of the Miller Test for obscenity) if the material is deemed otherwise harmful to minors, died in the state Senate.

Minnesota: Fair ebook contract legislation is making its way through committees, which has opened up the floor for attacks on libraries providing ‘inappropriate materials’ and attacking the Minnesota Library Association’s relation to ALA.

New York: Trying again to pass another Freedom to Read Act ([S.8630A](#)). Last year a similar bill passed but was vetoed by Governor Kathy Hochul. Hochul claimed the bill “will do more to confuse than to clarify” the obligations of librarians.

Tennessee: Books have been removed from multiple public libraries, including the Rutherford County Public Library System, whose board ordered books moved to the adult section based on lists compiled by Board Chair [Cody York](#) and Board member [Beth Duffield](#). The reasons are listed in their personal reviews and how they deemed the books to be inappropriate. At a March 16 [board meeting](#), Library Director Luanne James refused to move the books, citing proper removal procedures and First Amendment violations. At a special meeting on March 30, James was fired. The board also voted to remove any [policies](#) that were associated with ALA. They did, however, receive a letter from [FIRE](#) warning them of the unconstitutionality of their actions.

Virginia: After a complaint from one parent about the *Heartstopper* book series, the Newport News Public School District’s Library Supervisor directed librarians in all 11 school libraries to remove the books from shelves and electronic databases immediately, bypassing well-established reconsideration procedures.

Wyoming: [HB10](#), which would pull “sexually explicit” books from the children’s sections of public libraries, died in committee. ■

LGBTQ+ Interest Group

Get Ready For Pride




Spring is finally here, which means there's still time to plan for summer! If you're looking for ways your library can celebrate, the LGBTQ+ Interest Group has compiled some of our best advice. If you would like to plan a pride program at your library, but aren't sure where to start, take a look at what we're up to. And don't forget, you can celebrate pride beyond June. You can be an ally to the LGBTQ+ community all year long!










Whenever you are planning programs for Pride or other similar events, be sure to look and see what the nearest LGBTQ+ community groups and events are and reach out! There are PFLAG groups throughout the state, LGBTQ+ resource centers, and groups that organize Pride celebrations from Cumberland to Ocean City. These groups can often help spread the word in the community, and are usually very excited to see their local libraries hosting Pride events and want to see them succeed.—*Benjamin Egerman (he/him), Enoch Pratt Free Library*

From passive activities to deep discussions, your programming can range from simple to intricate and still have a high impact. Talk to your peers and borrow ideas from other libraries and librarians. Look for needs in the community that the library could fill like offering name change clinics or gender-affirming clothing swaps. Find charities that the library can help support or other local organizations to partner with. Whatever your idea is, if you're excited about it, that will show through. —*Shannon Carney (she/her), Baltimore County Public Library*






Our members have compiled some ideas to get the ball rolling!

Contributions by *Teresa Miller (she/her), Prince George's County Memorial Library System*; *Cassie Miller (she/her), Baltimore County Public Library*; and *Camilla Bergin Rhodes (she/her), Anne Arundel County Public Library*

-  Make friendship bracelets or beaded jewelry, or flag pins made from safety pins and seed beads.
-  Make zines.
-  Make signs to carry in a Pride march.

-  Host a queer cartoon watch party.
-  Rainbow story time, but for teens or adults: read works by LGBTQ+ poets together, or do a popcorn read-aloud of an LGBTQ+ book as a group.
-  Throw a Pride-themed toddler dance party.
-  Use books about LGBTQ+ history (like *No Way, They Were Gay?* by Lee Wind) to learn about LGBTQ+ historical figures. Tie it in with a craft, movie, or science project.
-  Do experiments with prisms to learn about the science of the rainbow.
-  Host an intergenerational panel or conversation featuring LGBTQ+ community members.
-  Facilitate a discussion-based program about LGBTQ+ representation in literature and media.
-  Organize an LGBTQ+ Writing Workshop.
-  Design a "We Have Always Been Here" Timeline Wall featuring key moments in LGBTQ+ U.S. history.

Other ideas including

-  Mini Button or Sticker Station
-  Drag Queen Bingo
-  Park & Pride Festival
-  Pride Trivia
-  Gender-affirming celebrations



2025 Rainbow Fest at Prince George's County Memorial Library System. Photos courtesy of Teresa Miller (she/her).





*Shoebbox pride floats from Baltimore County Public Library.
Photos courtesy of Anna White (she/her).*



Materials Interest Group

MARC Public Service Scenarios

Laura Bandoch, Harford County Public Library

In the last *Crab* article, we covered some very basic information about how to read a MARC record. I wanted to build on that knowledge and show how MARC knowledge can be of service to public facing staff.

Scenario 1: “I know we own it, but nothing comes up.”

A patron searches for a book by title, but the catalog shows no results.

What’s often happening in MARC

The title may be incorrectly entered in the 245 (Title) field.

The title may need a variation in the 246 of its title (For example, *The Diary of a Young Girl* is Anne Frank’s official biography name, but a customer may be asking for it by the title *Diary of Anne Frank*).

The patron may be asking by the **series** instead of a **book name** (i.e.: *A Game of Thrones* versus *Song of Ice and Fire*).

Why MARC knowledge helps

Knowing that the title must live in the 245 field helps you determine if this is a record issue or a user issue. It allows you to try different search methods to find a specific book.

Scenario 2: “Why is this filed under ‘Pride’ instead of ‘The Pride’?”

Titles beginning with “The,” “An,” or “A” do not sort where expected.

What’s happening in MARC

The second number (second indicator) after the 245 will tell a user how many characters the ILS is skipping when performing the title search. When a title has “The” in the beginning, most often the second indicator is 4—meaning the search will skip the first four characters in the 245 (thus it will skip the letters t, h, e, and the space). A second indicator of 2 will mean that if a title begins with A, the search will skip the first two characters.

Keep in mind that if you are searching for a Spanish title, the articles will be different. Patrons may not be readily familiar with these (el, la, los, la, un, una, unos, unas).

Why MARC knowledge helps:

You can confidently explain that the catalog ignores initial articles on purpose and that this behavior is controlled by MARC—it is not a glitch.

Scenario 3: “This says it’s a book, but it’s really an audiobook.”

They place a hold thinking they’ll get a print book but receive an audiobook instead.

What’s happening in MARC

Format information comes from fixed fields.

Vendor records sometimes code formats inconsistently.

The display label is generated from those coded fields.

Why MARC knowledge helps

You can identify this as a format coding problem, not a circulation mistake, and route it properly for correction.

Scenario 4: “I searched the author’s name, but nothing came up.”

A patron searches for an author and gets no results even though the library owns books by this author.

What’s happening in MARC

The author may not be a main author and could be missing as an added author in the 700 field.

Name authority control affects how names are indexed. Sometimes the authority from the Library of Congress for an author’s name is spelled differently than what is printed on the book.

If performing an exact match in Polaris, putting “John Green” in the search box will not show any results. You would need to put the last name first (Green, John).

Why MARC knowledge helps:

You can suggest alternate searches and understand why some contributors don’t behave like primary authors in results.

Understanding MARC is not just the job of a cataloger.

It is something that any public-facing librarian should be able to read and understand. This metadata directly impacts how our searches run and what results patrons see. If you want to dip your toes into more cataloging knowledge, there are online classes available for beginners to skilled catalogers.

Support Staff Division

SSD News

Lou Sica, Baltimore County Public Library

The Support Staff Division (SSD) of MLA has been having a great year! We capped off 2025 with our annual lunch meeting in early December. It was well attended and a good time was had by all.

We have increased our steering committee membership by two as we welcomed Xi Huang and Albina Schafert. We had a first-time candidate for officer positions as Albina ran for SSD Secretary and Jill Murphy ran for SSD Vice-President/President-Elect.

We hosted our traditional virtual meeting in February due to unpredictable winter weather and met at the Elkridge Branch of Howard County Library System in April. The Elkridge meeting included a tour of their **DIY Center**! This helped meet our annual workplan goal of meeting in branches that offer unique services. ◆

SSD is always excited for the annual MLA/DLA Conference in May! This year we are sponsoring two programs: "Let's Talk Stuff" and "Keeping You and the Library Safe: How to Handle Contaminated Materials."

SSD is also sponsoring two chocolate-themed baskets for the silent auction. SSD steering committee members are happily volunteering at the registration desk and silent auction.

SSD is excited for their upcoming standalone program: "**How to Effectively Manage Organizational Change**." This program will take place on June 18 from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. at the Arbutus Branch of Baltimore County Public Library. The branch is located at 855 Sulphur Spring Road, Halethorpe, MD 21227. Please visit the MLA website to register.

Last and most certainly not least, SSD is thrilled to celebrate our own President, Maria Jacob, on her well-deserved win as the recipient of the MLA Outstanding Support Staff Award! Maria's work as the Circulation Services Manager at the North Point Branch of BCPL, her systemwide involvement, and her status as a long-standing active member of MLA contributed to her receiving this honor. Congratulations, Maria! ■



Howard County Library System's DIY Center is housed at the Elkridge Branch.



The chocolate-themed baskets for the silent auction.



Youth Services Division

Happy Spring, *Crab* readers!

Jessica Letizia, Baltimore County Public Library

The “Kids are Customers Too” conference took place on Tuesday, April 7 at Howard County Library System’s Miller Branch. The planning committee worked hard to coordinate the final details of this much-anticipated conference. As MLA Youth Services Division’s last major program of the year, we appreciated the opportunity to connect in-person with our colleagues from around the state who love youth services and want to be inspired with new ideas to bring back to their branches.

The Maryland Blue Crab Young Reader Award winners were announced at the “Kids are Customers Too” conference. Youth Services Division (YSD) administers this annual award, recognizing outstanding fiction and nonfiction for early and transitional readers. Many thanks to Rhiannon George and Kristen Armstrong who co-chaired this year’s committee. If you are interested in being a part of next year’s committee, please keep an eye out for more information, coming this spring. Committee chairs and co-chairs are typically selected in May/June, and meetings begin in July.

If you plan to be at the MLA/DLA Annual Conference this year in Cambridge, please keep checking Social Events on Sched for details about YSD’s meetup. Whether you’re a long-serving member of YSD or just curious about what the Division does, all are welcome!

Attend a Meeting

YSD meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month from 12:00–1:00 p.m. and are fully online or hybrid via MLA Connect. Upcoming meetings will take place on May 11 and June 8, 2026.

Stay Informed

Check out our website [here](#).

Join the YSD mailing list or email the YSD officers at ysd.mdlib@gmail.com

Join the YSD group on MLA Connect.

YSD advances library services for children and teens through literacy and engaging programming that sparks curiosity while promoting excellence in youth services and providing opportunities for professional development. ■

Meet Karen Earp, Wicomico Public Library

I'm currently an Assistant Branch Manager at the Sarbanes Branch of Wicomico Public Library. I'm also the head of the Youth Services team, and I do all the things a Youth Services Coordinator would do in other systems. I've been in libraries since 2017, always youth services. Before libraries, I spent 20 years in IT, the last 10 as a Windows Systems Administrator.

I've served as the Youth Services Division (YSD) Secretary since 2022 and am excited to take on the job of YSD Vice President this summer. In my tenure as secretary, I managed the name change from Children's Services Division (CSD) to YSD, revised how we do our division meeting minutes/agendas, and reorganized our document storage. I've recently taken on the role of YSD Newsletter editor and am planning to keep editing it even after I move into the VP role. I'm hoping to bring TIG (the Teen Interest Group) more into the YSD family and update our mission & vision to reflect the "new" YSD.

Other things I do in libraryland

I'm the ALSC representative on the ALA ITAC (information technology advisory committee).

I'm on my fourth (maybe fifth?) year of my two-year tenure on the state Summer Reading Advisory Committee.

I've presented multiple times at the Kids are Customers, Too and MLA/DLA conferences. I'm presenting at both again this year.

In my community, I serve on several committees. I'm active on the Judy Center Steering Committee and Women United (a United Way committee). I represent the library at our city's Youth Development Committee. I do regular programs at a local museum and the Wicomico County Detention Center.

I love libraries because I love learning, teaching, and helping—and to me, that's what library work is all about.

Random facts:

My first paying job was cleaning chicken manure with a snow shovel. My first real job was making subs and pizzas at the Pizza King in Georgetown, Delaware.

I read several books at a time because I like to hop around.

My dream trip would be to go back and visit all of the places where I was stationed in the Navy. I'd love to take my adult children to see where they were born (Yokosuka,



Japan and Rota, Spain).

Something surprising: I live in a tiny house in my backyard with my husband. One of our daughters is renting our house.

My special talent: I can touch my nose with my tongue. ■

Email Listservs

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- If you want something to get out to ALL MLA members, email dvoelker@mdlib.org or mla@mdlib.org and we will email it out.

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