

FALL 2022

The Next Chapter



Tom Fay spoke at a Foundation event in June. (Photo by Elizabeth Carpenter)

Meet the Chief Librarian: Tom Fay leads the Library into the future

The Seattle Public Library is in a period of transition—both in how it operates in the aftermath of COVID-19, and under the leadership of a new Executive Director and Chief Librarian, Tom Fay.

Tom was unanimously selected by the SPL Board of Trustees in March, after serving as Interim Chief Librarian since April 2021. He previously served as Director of Library Programs since 2015.

We asked Tom a few questions about his perspective on library work and his vision for what's next:

How did you first get involved with libraries?

Growing up in a small rural community in Nevada, my local library was a constant in my life and I loved to read. About the time I turned 16, the town librarian asked me if I wanted to work in the library in the late afternoon and evening as a page.

I was working construction jobs and we were generally done by 2 p.m. due to the heat in the summers. So, I was pretty excited about a job with air conditioning. I spent more than 32 years

in Nevada libraries, and retired from Las Vegas-Clark County Library as the Chief Operating Officer/Deputy Director.

What were your main objectives at the beginning of your tenure, and how have they progressed?

I first focused on moving the Library from constant pandemic-era crisis management to more normalized operations and pacing. This includes getting as many services and programs back up and running for our patrons as possible.

I have also focused on meeting and talking to many people as I introduce myself to the community. I've dedicated the last three months to planning for our future work, including hiring a foresight consultant to work with the Library on identifying plausible and preferred futures for which we can plan and move towards.

What do you want Seattle residents to understand about the Library and how it's evolving?

Libraries are one of the most adaptive institutions due to

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Tom heard from patrons at the High Point Branch during a community conversation in August. (Photo by Leo Carmona)

the diversity and engagement of library patrons. The Library is always evolving with the needs of our patrons and our community because we listen and we adapt.

The foresight planning process we began this summer will ask our staff, our community, and our stakeholders to think of what libraries can and should be 10 years from now. Are we looking at more contactless, self-service kiosks? Will librarians harness the power of artificial intelligence to serve our patrons' information needs? Will libraries hold a space in the Metaverse and if so, how do we make sure there is equitable access to virtual reality technology and spaces? So many possibilities...

Are there any Library programs and services that you feel especially exemplify this evolution?

During the pandemic, you saw some evolution of the Library as a hybrid institution, providing program delivery both in-person and virtually. We have begun adding 24-hour lockers at branches so that patrons can access their materials at any time convenient for them. Our student tutoring solutions have expanded from providing in-person Homework Help at some branches to also providing Tutor.com, an online platform that provides real tutors online to help students in three languages.

As the Library's physical spaces reopen fully, what challenges and opportunities lie ahead?

It has been 25 years since the 1998 Libraries for All campaign that built up the system we enjoy today, with our world-renowned Central Library and 26 neighborhood libraries. We maintain our buildings well, but they were built for services and programs from nearly three decades ago.

We have seven historic Carnegie-era locations that are over a century in age. It is once again time to invest in our physical

spaces to make them welcoming, inclusive, and relevant for those today and for future generations.

The challenge for such large-scale improvements comes down to funding. We must be more creative than ever in finding and leveraging funding sources that combine public and private investments into our physical spaces to ensure relevance and enjoyment for another generation of Seattle readers and learners.

What do public libraries mean to our society?

Libraries are the most democratic institution in our city and our society. We are one of the pillars of an informed electorate, and today, with the amount of misinformation present in our country, our work is more necessary than ever. We must continue to amplify new voices and new thought, and we must protect the freedom to read, think, develop, and pursue happiness. There will be challenges on all fronts to library collections and services, because accurate information and the development of knowledge strike fear in authoritarians and tyrants.

“Accurate information and the development of knowledge strike fear in authoritarians and tyrants.”

- TOM FAY

What's the best book you've read in the past year?

I really liked our Seattle Reads choice last year – “The Vanishing Half” by Brit Bennett. I found it an intriguing story and incredibly well-written. I think everyone will enjoy the 2022 selection as well. ■

SEATTLE READS is a citywide book group that unites the community with one book selection annually. The Library's choice for 2022 is “The House of Broken Angels” by award-winning writer Luis Alberto Urrea. Pick up your copy at the Library and join live events with Urrea in English and Spanish in October. Learn more at spl.org/SeattleReads

Scholarship winners honor courageous civic leaders

The Foundation congratulates the three winners of the 2022 Stim Bullitt Civic Courage Scholarship!

First-place winner Sidra Wernli and runners-up Marysia Koltonowska and Olivia Turner each won tuition support from the Foundation by writing essays on courageous Washingtonians who improved their communities by fighting for their ideals. Their essays are now permanently cataloged in The Seattle Public Library's Seattle Room. Authors Kristen Millares Young, Jon Krakauer, and Jonathan Raban judged the finalists.

In its ninth year, the essay contest honors the legacy of the late Library supporter, community leader, and activist Stimson Bullitt, who believed that civic leadership could make a lasting positive impact on society.

This year's winning essays gave their authors the chance to learn about heroes new to them.

Wernli first learned about her subject, the longtime farmworker activist Rosalinda Guillen, through the scholarship process. "I found her story inspiring," Wernli said. "Once she started her activism, she never stopped. In her 70s, she is still working on what she started over 30 years ago."

"I think public libraries are hugely significant in promoting civic engagement and activism because of their role in democratizing knowledge."

- MARYSIA KOLTONOWSKA

Similarly, Koltonowska focused her essay on Flo Ware after realizing she didn't know about the history of the civil rights movement in Seattle. "The stories of Black people, and especially Black women, are often erased in mainstream settings, so when given the chance to learn more about a civic hero I wanted to use that opportunity to call attention to a systemically suppressed historical narrative," Koltonowska said. ■

Stay tuned for information on how to apply for next year, the 10th anniversary of the Stim Bullitt Civic Courage Scholarship!

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2022 WINNERS

Sidra Wernli \$5,000 Scholarship



Essay: "Rosalinda Guillen: The Fight for Food Justice"

School: Garfield High;

entering Lewis & Clark College

Library Branch: Douglass-Truth

Marysia Koltonowska \$2,500 Scholarship

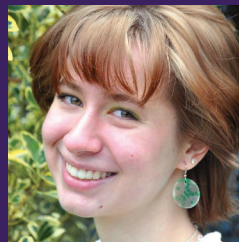


Essay: "Florestine 'Flo' Ware (1912-1981): A Community-Minded Change-Maker"

School: University of Washington

Library Branch: Northeast

Olivia Turner \$2,500 Scholarship



"The Environmental Activism of Hazel Wolf"

School: Chief Sealth International High;

entering University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Library Branch: Delridge

(Photos courtesy of the students)



Donte Felder (left) and Dr. Donald Felder (right) helped students pick out comic books for a Superhero Summer event in July. (Photo by Will Livesley-O'Neill)

South End Stories helps young readers find their inner superhero



the importance of storytelling and playful learning. This is especially important for public school students who don't engage as well with traditional classroom instruction.

This year, they partnered with the Library to plan the donor-supported Summer of Learning, choosing a theme that reflects their mission: Superhero Summer.

South End Stories, an anti-racist arts education program founded by Donte Felder and his team, including his father, Dr. Donald Felder, celebrates

Through months of planning, South End Stories and Library staff worked with local artists to create four heroes with superpowers relatable for young readers: helping their community, active listening, learning and sharing new perspectives, and using art to express emotions and solve problems.

Children could check out reading recommendations from each hero, pick up illustrated Superhero Summer action guides, and find book trackers and activity game boards at their local Library branch. And attendees of a pilot kickoff book fair at one summer school site received 10 free books to start or add to their home libraries, with a focus on authors of color and high interest books that are culturally relevant to the students.

"The kids were super excited," said Amy Twito, Informal

“Literacy development often occurs through stories, so we’re trying to reignite that.”

- DR. DONALD FELDER



Art by Gabby Park,
Sharon Tu, and Sloane Miller.

Learning Program Manager at the Library and the staff lead for Summer of Learning. “One student exclaimed, ‘Wow! This is the best day ever!’ as he picked out his 10 books.”

That sense of enthusiasm is why South End Stories centers superhero themes in much of its curriculum. Donte, a longtime educator at Orca K-8 School, remembers walking to the Columbia Branch as a child to pick out piles of novels and comic books. “These big superhero ideas—‘with great power comes great responsibility’—really helped define me as a man and as a teacher,” he said.

Dr. Felder saw the impact of empowering narratives in his career with Seattle Public Schools and Casey Family Programs, where he focused on improving education for children involved in corrections and the foster care system.

“Arts integrated with great teaching produces better outcomes,” he observed. “Superheroes help uplift what children think of themselves. When they enter a classroom, they start with a

belief that I belong and not why am I here.”

South End Stories has consistently found that connecting lessons to pop cultural phenomena like superheroes captures the attention of students who don’t usually have an affinity for reading, Donte said. This outcome advances the Seattle Public Schools goal to improve literacy among Black elementary school students and fits well with the Library’s goals for equity-based programming.

“South End Stories has been a wonderful planning partner for the Summer of Learning program due to their focus on racial equity and social-emotional learning, and their commitment to arts education,” said Twito.

And the Felders hope that the collaboration continues to grow, bringing more art—and the students it inspires—into classrooms and Library branches. As Dr. Felder said, “We have a great opportunity to spearhead not just a Summer of Learning, but learning all year, in partnership with the Library.” ■

*“Civ” is just one of the heroes who are part of the Library’s
Superhero Summer reading program for kids.
(Art by Brandon “BT” Thomas)*

THANKS TO DONOR SUPPORT,

in 2021 Summer of Learning distributed more than 14,000 books to over 10,000 students. You can learn more about this year’s program at spl.org/SummerOfLearning

South End Stories is fiscally sponsored by Intiman Theatre and supported by King County’s Best Starts for Kids initiative, Seattle University, and the City of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning. For more information visit southendstories-artsed.com





Markups, along with the dramatic spike in e-book interest in the pandemic, have made it very difficult for libraries to afford to keep up with how patrons want to access books.

In high demand, e-book costs continue to rise

E-books are more popular than ever among Library patrons—and more expensive than ever for Library systems.

Data from OverDrive, the digital platform used by many public libraries including Seattle, shows that e-book lending jumped by nearly 50 percent nationally in the first months of the pandemic. And the growth has continued. 2021 saw a 16 percent increase in digital materials borrowing over the previous year.

However, as demand has risen, so have the charges from publishers to libraries. E-books are loaned in the same manner as physical books: to one borrower at a time. Yet libraries are often charged significantly more to purchase digital books than print books. Or, more commonly, libraries are required to buy licenses to e-books that expire after a certain number of uses or period of time, and then must be purchased again at the same high cost.

According to the advocacy organization Readers First, large

publishing houses can charge libraries between 13 percent to around 300 percent more for an OverDrive license or purchase compared to the retail cost of the same book in print. These markups, along with the dramatic spike in e-book interest in the pandemic, have made it very difficult for libraries to afford to keep up with how patrons want to access books.

While libraries and publishers work through the issues with e-book costs, including in some legislatures and courts, donor support is critical for The Seattle Public Library to bolster its digital collections. The Foundation helped increase the Library's e-book collection by 10 percent in 2021— but more is needed to ensure access to books now and into the increasingly digital future of the Library. ■

Your support helps add more than 100,000 physical books and increase the Library's digital collections each year. Give now at supportspl.org so everyone can access books when and how they want.

Why do you love your Library?

During the heat wave in July, we dropped by the Rainier Beach Branch to talk to patrons checking out books, using computer stations, and staying cool in the community spaces. Here's why they love coming to the Library:



I appreciate being able to do research and look things up. It's very helpful for someone who doesn't have a computer at home.

– *Walter*



I like reading, and it's also pretty quiet here! And not so hot.

– *Sarah*



I tell my daughter, whatever you need to get, you go to the Library. Job applications, COVID tests, help using the Internet—you can get everything here. I don't even know what I would do without the Library.

– *Felicia*



There are so many books!

– *Asa*

It's when I get computer time!!

– *Paul*

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