



## Rhode Island Coalition of Library Advocates

NEWSLETTER

June 2016

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*Senator Jack Reed, seen here on a visit to Providence's Anthony Carnevale Elementary School, met with Rhode Island library advocates in Washington on National Library Legislative Day.*

### COLA LOBBIES FOR LIBRARIES IN WASHINGTON

Every May, the American Library Association (ALA) hosts National Library Legislative Day (NLLD). This year, library advocates were briefed on current issues Monday, May 2, and met with legislators and their staffs on Tuesday, May 3. Rhode Island was represented by Ed Garcia (Cranston PL), Jack Martin (Providence PL), Karen Mellor (Office of Library and Information Services), Sarah Morenon (School Librarians of RI), Joan Ress Reeves, Rose Ellen Reynolds (COLA), and Tom Viall (Library Board of RI)—and as usual, our delegation met with helpful

staffers for Senators Reed and Whitehouse and Representative Langevin. Senator Reed, whose unflagging support for libraries makes us the envy of ALA, met the delegation in person. Representative Cicilline had a conflict: he was in RI getting an award from the Providence Community Library. Among the year's issues are 1) supporting the nomination of Carla Hayden—an actual librarian!—for Librarian of Congress; 2) funding library support under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) provision in the Every Student Succeeds Act; 3) supporting copyright reforms; 4) increasing no-fee access to government-funded information; 5) restoring Constitutional privacy rights that were lost to overbroad legislation after 9/11; and 6) supporting Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules to ensure “net neutrality”; working to close the homework gap and ensure that all libraries have access to affordable high-capacity broadband.

## BECOMING HUMAN AGAIN AT COLA'S ANNUAL MEETING



**TONY ESTRELLA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE GAMM THEATRE, QUOTED POET PHILIP LARKIN'S "CHURCH GOING." THE LIBRARY IS "A SERIOUS HOUSE ON SERIOUS EARTH," HE TOLD US—A PLACE "PROPER TO GROW WISE IN," WHERE WE CAN BECOME FULLY HUMAN.**



**SWEETHEART OF THE YEAR DR. CHERYL ANN MCCARTHY SPOKE MOVINGLY OF A CAREER SPENT IN LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY EDUCATION, LOVING ALMOST EVERY MINUTE.**



**BERGERON SCHOLAR CHELSEA ORDNER AND ALDRICH SCHOLAR ALYSSA TAFT, RISING LEADERS IN RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES.**

*Thanks to GSLIS photographer Alison Barker.*

This year COLA celebrated National Library Week at the State House, where we held our annual meeting in style. Refreshments were catered by Venda Ravioli, and Chair Emerita Rose Ellen Reynolds greeted old friends and new at the membership table. Librarians and supporters of every type of library were there; so were representatives of the Office of Library and Information Service, the Library Board of Rhode Island, and the University of Rhode Island's College of Arts and Sciences, Harrington School, and Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS).

The William Bergeron Scholarship was awarded to Chelsea Ordner, a 2015 GSLIS graduate with a promising future in public libraries. The Linda Aldrich Scholarship was awarded to Alyssa Taft, a current student preparing for an active career in school libraries. Named in memory of vibrant colleagues, the scholarships give us an annual preview of new library leadership.

William E. Reeves Friends Awards went to the Friends of Rochambeau Library for their successful fundraising, the Friends of Tiverton Library for community service, and Friends of the Westerly Library for outreach.

Dr. Cheryl Ann McCarthy, our Sweetheart of the Year, retires this spring after decades spent building strong school library media services—as a librarian, as president of the New England Library Association, and for the past 25 years as a professor at GSLIS. Her words of thanks were inspiring—as was guest speaker Tony Estrella's talk, "A Serious House on Serious Earth It Is: Becoming Human Again at the Public Library." Both reminded us of the creative power of library service for people of all ages as we search for information and meaning.

Toby Rossner earned special thanks, as she has for many years, for the design and production of award certificates.

Officers were elected for the coming year: Howard Boksenbaum, Chair; Gale Eaton, Secretary; and Neeltje Henneman, Treasurer. New board members were elected for a 3-year term expiring in 2019: Lisa Ashe, Wilfred Barbeau, David Bates, Marcus Mitchell, Pnina Pressburg, and Monica J. Schaberg. Chair of the Nominating Committee: Gale Eaton. The office of Vice-chair / Chair Elect remains to be filled.

We look forward to a constructive year of library advocacy and support.

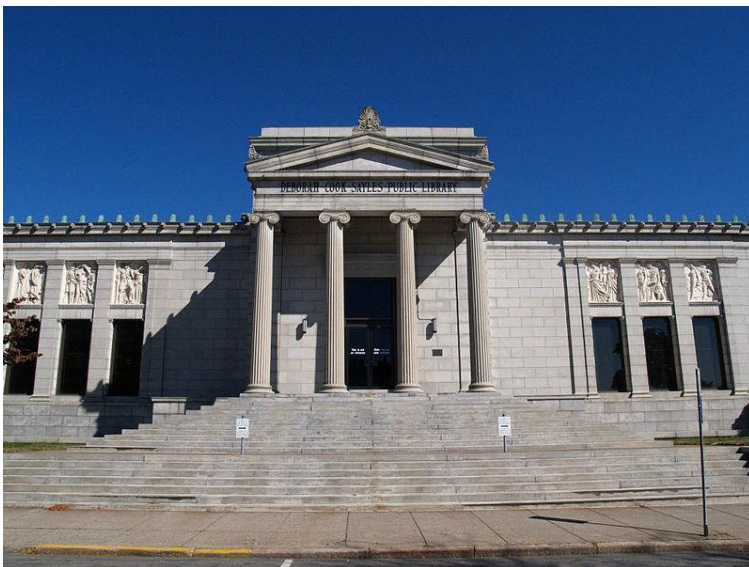
## WHAT TO ADVOCATE THIS YEAR AND HOW

The first goal of the RI Coalition of Library Advocates is (surprise!) to advocate effectively for all Rhode Island libraries. We aren't alone in this—but our partners need our help. For instance:

- The School Librarians of Rhode Island (SLRI) have an advocacy committee that works to strengthen our state's school library media programs. One urgent priority for 2016: ensure that school staffs include qualified librarians. Too many cash-strapped towns are closing school libraries or trying to keep them open with volunteers. Certified librarians wear many hats—they introduce K-12 students to good books and media, they teach information skills, they work with teachers to strengthen lesson plans, they develop and manage collections to support learning—and research shows that students in schools with active school library programs do better on standardized tests.
- The Rhode Island Library Association (RILA) is lobbying for full funding of the State Grant-in-Aid program under Chapter 29-6 of the RI General Law. Public libraries that meet standards are eligible to receive State funding equal to 25 percent of their municipal and endowment appropriations, based on figures from the prior two fiscal years. Unfortunately, the program has not been fully funded since the 2008 recession. To restore full funding would cost the state an additional \$1.4 million—just pennies for each of the 5,888,256 library visits, 6,723,351 items borrowed, and 1,238,151 uses of public library computers RI residents enjoyed in 2015.

SLRI and RILA are well armed with information; their librarian members are good advocates. But COLA represents library users. When librarians advocate for libraries, it's all too easy to be cynical about it. Their livelihoods are at stake. Library users need to be heard as well. We need to tell our legislators, governors, and newspapers the library story, from the point of view of plain grassroots advocates. Some starting points:

- SLRI makes it easy to advocate for school libraries. Visit <https://www.smores.com/q4hdd-school-library-month-2016> for links to your state legislators, to clearly written petitions you can forward, and more.
- The Secretary of State's website is a wealth of information. See <http://sos.ri.gov/divisions/open-government> for information about public meetings in your community. You can even sign up for email alerts.
- The RI Office of Library and Information Services updates the status of legislation affecting RI libraries at <http://www.olis.ri.gov/news/legislation/index.php>.
- Nationally, United for Libraries gathers resources for trustees, Friends, and others: <http://www.ala.org/united/>.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Minerva Sanders, the first librarian of the Pawtucket Public Library, scandalized 19th-century library leaders by promoting recklessly liberal policies:

- Open shelves—letting users touch and examine books before choosing them.
- Welcoming children as soon as they could climb up those steps.
- Opening on Sundays for the convenience of working families.

What would she be doing now to make our libraries more useful?

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## FROM THE CHAIR

Wednesdays I walk the bike path half an hour to the next town to breakfast with friends. I hear birds all the way. Most prevalent are the song sparrows' unmistakable but (despite their name) unmusical call. Mockingbirds, cardinals, robins, finches, mourning doves, red-winged blackbirds, I've heard; yellow warblers, cowbirds, catbirds, gulls, swifts. Meanwhile, the buzz in my head is often about libraries. What would a birds' library look like—well, sound like? Would it be all sound files? Or should we suppose that birds capable of creating a library would have devised some sort of transcription methodology? How would birds arrange their works? For that matter, what are we hearing when we hear birdsong? What do the birds hear that I don't?

When I say, "That's a song sparrow," am I saying, "That's Russian," or "That's Dostoyevski," "That's *Notes from the Underground* (Treetop?)," or "That's the 2016 edition of Dostoyevski's *Notes from the Underground*, edited by M. Melodia"?

I have no answers, just questions. The important thing is the buzz. Libraries fit into the conversation everywhere. Let's make it COLA's job to put libraries into public discourse as well, everywhere they fit. Talk about libraries whenever you have a chance: the supermarket checkout line, waiting for Starbucks (or Dunkin'), the summer block party, Town Meeting, the General Assembly. Let's let no one forget how important our libraries are, let's keep them on the tip of everyone's tongue.

*Howard Boksenbaum, Chair*