

Tucker: World of libraries has changed during her career

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"She had a tough time when she first got here. There were drug dealers and drugs — needles and things being used in the library. She'd have to go around and pick things up. Security was bad," LaMear said. "It was hard, and she did a good job turning it around."

Tucker, who has been deeply involved in the public library division of the Oregon Library Association, said she will continue volunteering for Libraries ROCC.

This week, Tucker attended her final Library Board meeting, a joint work session where board members and the City Council discussed the future of the library and options for renovating the facility or building a new one.

Ruth Metz, a library consultant, told the large crowd at the party that when Tucker's time came to leave, "she wanted to leave you with a really splendid library, and I know there's a disappointment for her in this, in a way."

But, she continued, Tucker, in addition to setting up the library's many programs with her staff and co-workers, "created a platform for the next thing."

The library building has suffered from decades of deferred maintenance and doesn't meet many of the needs of modern library users. But, David Oser, a Library Board member, said "I have never, in any area of business, seen anyone who has been able to do more with less than Jane Tucker."

The number of yearly visits has risen from about 50,000 to almost 90,000 since 2007, even though the library's hours of operation haven't changed, according to data Oser provided.

At Tucker's party, City Manager Brett Estes gave Tucker an engraved pewter plate commemorating her service.



Jane Tucker laughs with friends and colleagues during her retirement party Thursday evening at Astoria Public Library.

Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

"Jane is really the reason I'm a librarian," said Seaside Library Director Esther Moberg, who worked as a librarian for Tucker in Astoria before pursuing her career in librarianship — a decision she made with her mentor's advice and encouragement. "I feel like I owe so much to Jane, and it's part of the reason I came back here to be library director: When I saw that Jane was still in Astoria, it really made a difference."

Connecting to books

Tucker began bringing books to readers as a 15-year-old bookmobile page in her hometown of Fairhaven, Massachusetts.

Her high school English teachers had recommended her for the job with her local library — the grand Millicent Library built by Henry Huttleston Rogers in memory of



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Library Director Jane Tucker shares a laugh during a Library Board meeting Tuesday.

his deceased daughter.

From then on, Tucker's path, she said, was "pretty clear: connecting people to books."

Tucker, a library and information science gradu-

ate of Simmons College in Boston who has worked as a librarian throughout the country, said the profession is not without difficulties.

Budget constraints prevent libraries from purchas-

ing books on every topic the community wants to read about. And staff must make sure their collection represents different sides of an issue. Librarianship, she said, is a profession for people hungry for knowledge and grateful for literature. "Most people go to work to exercise the expertise they've already gained, and to hone it a little more," she said. But, every day, librarians confront what they don't know. "Every day of my life, I've learned something new."

Her job, she said, hasn't been to influence patrons' lives so much as "give them what they need to influence their own life" — to empower them by helping them learn.

"I can't believe that I've been able to do something this wonderful for this long," she said.

In retirement, Tucker — whose favorite work of fiction is Ernest Hemingway's short novel "The Old Man and the Sea" — plans to travel with her husband, Jon Lingel, and focus on family, writing and art.

'Read and read'

The world of libraries has changed during Tucker's career, which saw the rise of online technology. But "the basic values of librarianship, I believe, are still there: You're bringing information, and you're bringing reading, to people."

Whether the reading is done with a digital device or a printed page, "you're still connecting people with literacy," she said. "And literacy is still the foundational skill ... No matter what else you want to do, you need literacy."

A growing emphasis on early childhood literacy has also shaped libraries in recent decades.

"Your child starts learning to read the day they're born, and those early growth years, birth to 5, are so important," she said. "There's a little bit of a science to it, and there's a definite advantage in having heard more words by the time you go to school."

Tucker remembers her very first visit to the Millicent Library. She and her mother had been talking about things and places in their town that cost money.

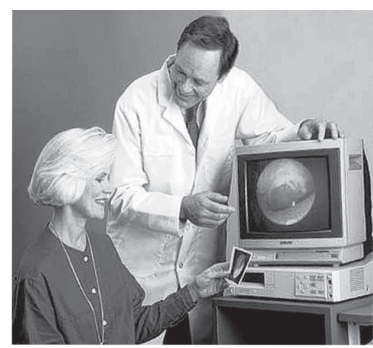
As they entered, "I said to my mother ... 'Do we pay to come in here?' And she said, 'No, the adults in your community give you this.' And I said, 'Oh, you mean like Auntie Joan and Auntie Helen?' And she said, 'No — all the adults in this community, even the ones you don't know, pay to give you this.'"

"And over the years, I just thought how fabulous that was, how amazing that was," she said, "and what a gift it became to a child like me who just had to read and read."

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