

Library manager relishes solving patrons' puzzles

By **PATRICK WEBB**
Chinook Observer

ILWACO, Wash.— It is a truth universally acknowledged that all modern library managers secretly prefer the title “information warrior.”

Amy Hitchcock laughed behind her mask when a visitor suggested that. But she is ready for battle, leading the Ilwaco Timberland Library branch back into some semblance of cautious normalcy as some COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

Her core belief is that libraries must continue to play a crucial role, providing accurate information as well as enrichment and entertainment.

“People come here for so many different reasons,” said Hitchcock, gesturing to shelves neatly stacked with murder mysteries and contemporary romances she devours off duty. “Of course we have books, and entertainment like DVDs, but there is so much more that the library has.”

About helping people

Hitchcock, 42, took the helm of the Ilwaco branch when Susan Carney and two long-serving colleagues retired last year.

She earned a bachelor's degree in linguistics at the Evergreen State College in Olympia and a master's degree in adult education and training at Seattle University before working in higher education, evaluating programs and designing curriculum.

She and attorney husband, Jon Quittner, had relocated to Ilwaco from the Seattle area, in part to assist her mother, afflicted by multiple sclerosis. They initially cared for her at home before medical needs prompted a move to Golden Sands for professional care.

Hitchcock began working parttime at the library four years ago while teaching English composition and literature for Grays Harbor College through the Raymond campus.

“The college met my intellectual needs and the library was all about helping people,” she said.

The library manager job opening presented an opportunity to focus. “I wanted to be really challenged,” she said, acknowledging the statement's irony in today's COVID-19 world.

The pandemic touched the Long Beach Peninsula in March 2020. At first libraries closed, then Ilwaco and other Timberland branches fulfilled online book requests with no-contact pick-up services.

Now the building at 151 First Avenue North is open Wednesday through Saturday, requiring masks and distancing, with restrictions on numbers of people using



Patrick Webb

Amy Hitchcock was appointed manager at the Ilwaco Timberland Library branch after the retirement of Susan Carney. She is helping the library gradually resume normalcy as COVID restrictions are eased.

computers and browsing bookshelves.

Puzzle-solving mission

Other than reading, Hitchcock's other hobby is knitting. Creating useful garments from raw yarn is an apt metaphor for her mission, responding to patrons' needs. “It's complex life tasks, it's solving puzzles,” she said. Some library users need guidance working their technology; others seek information and entertainment.

“We don't always know how we can help them, but we have community connections and online resources, as well as reference books. There's a wider world,” she said. “And that's the really fun part, talking with people, getting to know them and finding out what they are asking. Then we can match them with what they need.”

Hitchcock has continued to strengthen links with Ilwaco High School and Hilltop Middle School, hosting virtual research workshops, steering students toward accurate information.

Trustworthy sources

Another demographic is devoutly eager. “Homeschoolers are one of my favorite groups — the ones that use the library extensively, their kids are awesome,” she said.

Homeschooling parents seek clarity.

‘THERE ARE TRUSTWORTHY SOURCES OUT THERE — AND LIBRARIANS KNOW THEM.’

Amy Hitchcock |
Ilwaco library manager

“There's a bunch of misinformation and sources that can't be trusted,” she said. “But there are trustworthy sources out there — and librarians know them.”

One recent interaction with a mother came to mind. “She wanted to teach her kids to access information and know whether it was trustworthy. It was really fun for me to give her some really concrete resources and help her.”

Making connections

Hitchcock commends her retired boss for laying the groundwork for her own leadership. “Susan Carney was incredible. She forged community connections and made the library part of the community. It is all about helping people. I want to continue doing that and build on that.”

She has linked with Madeline Moore at the Columbia Pacific Heritage Museum in Ilwaco to develop a historical storytelling collaboration

and spearheaded monthly online poetry evenings with Peninsula Players, whose actors have been thirsting to perform to theater audiences since last March.

Other events include kids' story times and even yoga online through Zoom, a computer videoconferencing program.

Invention drives knowledge

When library system leaders in Tumwater asked her for a favorite quote for an introductory profile, Hitchcock chose one from modern Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire. “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

When they announced her appointment, she added one of her own. “Education and libraries are best friends, so it's a great fit for my interests and skill set.”

Daughter upset by dating father

Dear Annie: I am 70 years old and have just relocated to the U.S. from overseas after an unexpected divorce. It was my daughter's suggestion for me to move here. I've bought a house and am 5 miles from my daughter's house. This is the first time in years that I have lived close to her and my two grandchildren. It's been a huge change for me, and I am still getting used to things here.

My daughter is still married, but she and her husband haven't lived together for seven years. She is currently furloughed from her job.

While I want to be here and be involved in their lives, I also want a life of my own as I cannot be with them all the time. Using a dating website, I met a woman. I wasn't sure whether to tell my daughter, but my daughter told me how she'd met a man on a dating site and they were planning to meet soon — so I figured I'd open up and tell her about my new friend. It seemed like she approved or at least didn't disapprove.

Then it came to my eldest grandson's birthday. I forgot his card and present, so I asked my new lady friend to bring them to my daughter's house for me. I got it from her when she arrived outside and gave her a quick kiss goodbye. I went in and gave it to my grandson who was overjoyed with the present. My daughter on the other hand was unhappy, as she saw my lady friend.

Now my daughter wants nothing to do with me anymore because she thinks I'm only thinking about myself. During the last three months, my daughter has only been in my house three times and for less than 10

minutes on each occasion. I've been to their house many times and each time for several hours at a time. I'm told I only care about myself and she doesn't want anything else to do with me now. I'm partially reliant on her regarding the final part of my immigration here. If she withdraws from that, then I'm in trouble and may have to leave as a result.

DEAR ANNIE



ANNIE LANE
Creators
Syndicate Inc.

She feels that I am selfish and don't care about her and the boys but that isn't true. I just want some life of my own along with being here to be close to them. This is a huge problem for me and I have no idea how to make it right. —

Dissed By Daughter

Dear Dissed: I don't know what your daughter's problem is, but it's not you. Some unhappiness in her personal life is probably causing her to lash out so irrationally. Hopefully, she comes to her senses and apologizes. The immigration factor does complicate things. I'd recommend consulting with an immigration lawyer to see what other options you might have so you don't have to rely on the whims of a petulant daughter. You didn't lug your whole life 2,000 miles to be her punching bag.

Dear Annie: With an eye toward Earth Day, I wanted to encourage your readers to try going meatless (and preferably vegan) at least one day a week. Animal agriculture is responsible for more greenhouse gases than all transportation combined. — *Healing the Planet Together*

Dear Healing the Planet Together: Thanks for the letter. I'd encourage anyone to give plant-based a try, at least part of the time. It's easier than you'd think!

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