



Copper Queen Library recognized as 'Best Small Library in America'

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The Copper Queen Library was named 2019's Best Small Library in America award by the Library Journal. Library manager Jason Macoviak and program coordinator Alison Williams stand in front of the historic Bisbee Library.
Mark Levy | Herald/Review

BISBEE — The creativity of the staff and volunteers have made the Copper Queen Library a hit with the patrons, and now it has been recognized nationwide with the EBSCO Excellence in Rural Library Service Award as the 2019 “Best Small Library in America.”

According to the Library Journal, which provided readers with a multi-page story on the Copper Queen Library’s accomplishment, the award honors a public library serving a community of less than 25,000 people “that demonstrates excellence of service to its community as exemplified by an overall service program or a special program of significant accomplishment.” The award, which also comes with a \$5,000 check for the library, honors a public library which shows “uniqueness of service of program” and its “impact on the community” into the future.

To be in the running, library manager Jason Macoviak and library program coordinator Alison Williams had to provide support letters, media stories and an essay highlighting accomplishments.

Williams said, “It’s exciting to be the winner. To go to the conference was huge. Usually, the award goes to a larger city which has more resources than ours.”

Macoviak added, “They called us one morning to tell us. I was listening in disbelief. What a complete honor to be named (the best) out of all the small libraries in America. We all struggle with no staff and limited resources. But, we share innovative ways to keep up with public need.”

Once the anxiety of leaving the library for the three-day trip to Vermont was relieved by determined, capable volunteers to keep it open in their absence, both Macoviak and Williams went to the Association of Rural and Small Libraries Conference and enjoyed accepting the honor and the recognition of their peers.

Macoviak even took a photo with his cellphone of the attendees from his vantage point on stage before accepting the award.

“Everybody was cheering and so excited, I wanted to have that moment captured,” he said with a big smile.

The Library Journal featured the essence of the ever-evolving library with Tucson photographer Steven Meckler’s colorful pictures as he captured all the activities over a 10-hour shoot.

Williams recalled, “It was a long day.”

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The Copper Queen Library, under the leadership of Macoviak and the energy of Williams, has undergone a renaissance both inside and out of its historic building on Main Street in Old Bisbee. The library serves 3,500 patrons in a town of just 5,192 residents, as of 2017, though some are from outlying areas.

Macoviak, Williams, members of Friends of the Copper Queen Library and scores of other volunteers have developed the services now available to the growing, unique mix of patrons — from tots to oldsters — to suit their needs across a spectrum of interests going far beyond reading and far beyond the 100-plus-year-old walls.

Outside of the books, periodicals, DVDs and public access computers available at the library, patrons can now check out wireless hotspots to surf the web at home.

And, going beyond the written and spoken word, the library also checks out bocce balls, pickleball kits and canopies for the city, helping out the Bisbee Public Works Department.

“We even have a button-making kit,” said Williams.

It also holds a native seed library and the meetings of the Bisbee Bloomers, who built an outdoor garden on the balcony and donated \$500 to the library to purchase books focused on gardening for adults and children, she added.

The library hosts other community groups, as well as a lecture series of interesting topics. Local experts hold talks in the library’s meeting room and the walls feature the work of local artists.

Seeing the need for services in the San Jose District, an annex was opened in the Bisbee Unified School District’s old middle school on Melody Lane in December last year. It takes up a former classroom and offers residents comfortable, easy access to many of the offerings of the main library, with a focus on toddlers and pre-K children to prepare them for school.

The annex was made possible by grants from Freeport McMoRan and the Arizona Library Association and many mini-grants, said Williams. Step Up Bisbee/Naco provided funds for shelving and the Bisbee High School Career and Technical Education class helped install it. Step Up also handled the wiring.

They have involved Bisbee schools and recently Naco Elementary School to provide library cards so students have an easy time checking out materials.

“We went to the Bisbee Unified School District, sat down with them and told them we will make a program for you, help provide resources for projects,” added Macoviak.

The district’s students not only provide tutoring for the lower grades, but also work with adults to familiarize themselves with digital technology.

Macoviak said, “Just come to the library and see the immediate interaction between them.”

Williams added, “So many of our partners all have the education future of our children at heart.”

“Really, the whole community is involved with the library. They helped build the system from recognizing the need. We’re really just the caretakers,” said Macoviak.

The two are looking forward to next year when they get to present the honor to the recipient of the 2020 Best Small Library in America.

More Information

While John Szabo, Los Angles city librarian, was in Bisbee on Sept. 7 to authenticate a lost work of art owned by Floyd Lillard, owner of Miner’s and Merchant’s Antiques, he could not resist visiting the city’s historic Copper Queen Library. He learned it had just received the “Best Small Library in America in 2019.” He complimented the staff and volunteers on the breadth of its offerings, including its special programs.

“From what I saw, it’s a well-deserved honor. It’s a gem.”



Copper Queen Library Manager Jason Macoviak talks about the esteemed award the facility was presented as library program coordinator Alison Williams looks on.

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The Library Journal's 2019 Best Small Library award, which was presented to the Copper Queen Library, sits in the foreground.

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