Erin Rydgren Takes the Helm

The Iowa Small Library Association (ISLA) has a new leader! Say hello to President Erin Rydgren. Erin was ISLA Vice President but recently stepped into the presidential position. She is currently Assistant Director at Cherokee Public Library. Her path there is long, winding, and wonderful.

Erin hales from Salem, Massachusetts and has always loved books and libraries. In high school, she interned at the Phillips Library. Phillips housed many amazing items in their collection and Erin’s time there reignited her passion for libraries.

Erin began working in Iowa libraries six years ago as a part-time assistant at the Cherokee Public Library. Though she remained at Cherokee, Erin expanded her knowledge and experience by becoming director of the Washta Public Library located inside of River Valley Elementary School.

Erin accepted the position of Assistant Director at the Cherokee Public Library in 2020 where she catalogues materials, contributes to programming, and manages the daily circulation desk. In 2021, Erin served as co-chair of the Speaker’s Committee for the ILA Annual Conference and was elected Vice President/President-Elect of ISLA.

On a personal note, Erin shares that she has three children and spends much of her time running around after them. She also enjoys reading, crossword puzzles, and video games.

Erin Rydgren, President
Iowa Small Library Association

The Iowa Library Association Annual Conference is October 12-14 at the Hyatt Regency Coralville Hotel and Conference Center. Click here to register.

The Iowa Small Library Association will hold their Fall Business Meeting at the Conference site on Thursday, October 13 at 5:00pm. All members are encouraged to attend. Conference registration is not required.

Click here to view the minutes from the ISLA 2022 Spring Meeting.
With the uncertainty of Covid still lingering last year, I tried something different for my summer reading program. It worked so well that I did it again this year with some tweaking. I am a B size library in a town of around 750 people. I face the same woes—summer rec, daycare out of town, and popularity of the pool in the afternoons—as do many other small towns. I am open three days a week and Saturday mornings and I am the sole employee. I feel this different approach is manageable and reaches more age groups than the traditional programming that I did before. I intentionally omit ages so I can appeal to more kids and guide them to the aspects I think would best fit them.

“Kids Stories & Snacks” is every library day from 11:15 to 11:40 am. Readers come every day that they can and children under 5 need a caregiver present. I have different families who can make it on certain days but not all at the same time. This way, I can reach more kids when it’s convenient for them. Family vacations and special things like swimming lessons or Vacation Bible School don’t totally put the whammy on my programming. For this program, I have several books and complementary crafts at the ready. I then gear the program for the audience in attendance that day. Additionally, the snacks are simple and pre-packaged so participants may take them to go. Check out the Kanawha Facebook page to see examples.

Again, playing to the age of my audience, I have also relied on Mad Libs and kid-generated story telling activities. I find that school-age kids enjoy recording the books they have read each week onto a bookmark. The bookmarks then serve as raffle tickets for grand prize drawings. Reading BINGO sheets also provide kids with another way to vie for prizes. I found some good deals on camping themed books for different ages and purchased fun stuff from the iREAD goodies, and from the local Dollar General.

I host special events like movies or the PBS summer special Molly of Denali in the afternoon but attendance is usually low due to the lure of the local swimming pool. However, my weekly make and take creative projects are popular. I have a checklist to keep track of who got the projects so I can make sure to give them out to kids who didn’t make it for them the first time around.

For teens, I do “Teen Book Club to Go”—an idea I found in last year’s iREAD manual. A plain brown paper lunch bag is filled with the book they read and keep, some goodies including a snack, and a short book review form to fill out and return by the end of the program. Upon completion, teens receive a prize for their efforts. This is simple and works well for that age group.

For adults, I do “Summer Fun Read,” an idea that I snagged from somewhere. Participants enter their name for reading an adult book or listening to an audio book, reading 5 magazines, or reading 5 children’s books. The materials must come from Kanawha Public Library. Adults then fill out a slip each time they complete one of these options. They receive a prize from the goodies basket of items largely from Dollar General. By the way, I had many more adults doing the program this year—yay!

This set up has been much less stressful and easier to do as one person than what I had done in the past with a traditional weekly program that was an hour long! I also don’t spend money on outside programs so I can fund all these creative projects and good prizes. The big outside programs were so hard to schedule for the biggest attendance for the money. I may do some of the more cost effective or free programs again in the future.

Thanks for “visiting” my summer program!

Respectfully,

Christine Guthmiller
Are you looking for an opportunity to hone or expand your leadership skills? ISLA has the answer! We are seeking candidates for the following positions:

Vice President/President Elect
Secretary
Treasurer

Please email President Erin Rydgren at erin@cherokee.lib.ia.us

Ely Public Library welcomed AmeriCorps VISTA Maddie Ellsworth into their fold this summer. She was eager to share her experience.

“The VISTA role gave me an intimate view of the inner workings of a public library. I never realized how much work, planning, and reliance on volunteerism was needed to make everything run smoothly!” said Maddie.

Maddie mentioned that more volunteers were needed. “Next summer, the library should seek student volunteers in early spring before the school year ends.” Maddie suggested tapping into the National Honor Society and the Key Club.

Maddie was impressed by Ely’s summer lineup and the emphasis on youth programming. “Events were offered daily at 2pm, in addition to our normal story times. Kids and caregivers enjoyed access to free recreational programming.”

“I was responsible for facilitating teen events. I formed relationships with the regulars and developed a sense of what programming would most attract this age group,” said Maddie.

“Our most popular event was our Pride Party which featured gaming, pizza, crafts, and book chats.”

Maddie drew some conclusions regarding teen events. “The pattern might be that there is no pattern. The same group of young adults will attend an event, any event, if you feed them and provide them with an opportunity to be social.”

Maddie concluded, “All in all, being a Summer VISTA at my local library was a great experience and I learned a lot. I would encourage everyone to get involved with their local library no matter how small or large the action is.”