CMLE Director’s Report

Board Meeting

September 11, 2019

We were hoping to have a slower-paced summer, to get caught up on assorted projects around the office. That did not quite happen! Instead, the summer was filled with some really great things that will be able to roll out to share with our members.

* We have recorded 14 episodes of Reading With Libraries, with all new genres covered this season. This season starts Thurs Sept 5 with Cozy Mysteries. From there we also look at Own Voices, Natural Disasters, Engineering, Indigenous Representations, and Narrative Nonfiction. One of our cutest episodes will also drop this season, with a family of kids ranging in age from two to eight. They all brought their favorite library books and shared ideas on good books, and strategies for getting kids to read more books – it was adorable. (It drops Nov. 7th; so subscribe now to get it in your favorite podcast app, or you can stream it on our website!) Our final episode every season is looking at Minnesota books, and that is the only one we still need to record. (Let me know if you want to join us!)
* We recorded nearly an entire season of Linking Our Libraries podcast, our training podcast. For this season, we recruited school library people to come in and talk about the topics important to them, and share information on material with their colleagues. Topics covered include: Working With Teachers, Professional Development, Integrating Tech with Literacy, and Services for Patrons With Learning Differences. In addition to these new voices on the training podcast, we also have Leah Larson (State Library Services), Kathy Parker (director of the St Ben’s/St John’s libraries), and Kate Wallace (St Cloud Tech and Community College). This season starts Thursday, Dec. 19.
* We set up a Podia.com subscription. This is going to be our platform for sharing online continuing education classes. This summer, we made ten small classes, one CE credit/clock hour each. The classes go along with our Linking Our Libraries episodes from last season, with quiz work, and we made a video to go with each. Angie learned to edit videos!
* We reworked our entire website. If you haven’t seen it lately, it looks entirely new, more colorful, and less content to navigate. Nearly all the prior content is still there – it’s just not so cluttered. We have more emphasis on the services we are providing to school libraries, as that is the direction the multitypes in general are shifting service focus. We have a static front page now, with a very cute little welcoming video, and an easier menu to browse.
* We prepped everything for our annual audit. As always, it’s a big project to organize. Angie took the lead on organizing our series of folders filled with documents. The auditors give us a numbered list of 40 or so different documents they need; we put those numbers onto paper files, copy or print the documents, and provide them on the audit day. We also scan them online and send them to the auditors through their portal system. Everything went fine, no issues were found, and the final report will be discussed at the Board meeting.
* I organized a lunch for the directors of the large libraries across our system. We do this a couple of times a year, and it’s always interesting to hear about the projects they are doing. This is part of our mission to build community across the system, and across library types.
* I went to Great River’s Comic Con event. I was on a panel discussion about podcasting, and spent a lot of the day in a room upstairs with our podcast equipment, recording quickie Book Bites episodes. (These are our five-minute book discussions, where a Guest Host shares a book they have enjoyed. Our episode from Tue Sept 3 was recorded there, and the Guest and I discussed our love of the book Good Omens.)
* I marched in the Sauk Rapids parade with the Great River library staff! (Note: I’m always available to march in parades – I love to wave and yell “join our summer reading program” to people!)
* I will give a presentation on Building Community at this year’s Minnesota Library Association (MLA) conference. Angie and I gave a very similar presentation last year when MLA was in St Cloud, and the room was literally overflowing with people! So I hope it will be useful to people this year too – it’s always an important topic in libraries.

Our big activity has been putting together the LSTA-funded project to share VR/AR kits with our school libraries. We were very excited to be awarded this grant, and are thankful to the Department of Education and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for this funding! (This project is funded with a grant from the Minnesota Department of Education using federal funding, CFDA 45.310 – Library Services and Technology Act, Grants to States Program (LS-00-19-0024-19).)

Some of the things we are doing right now to get this underway:

* Ordered the kits. (This is a slightly complicated process, but we worked through all the tax-free paperwork to get billed correctly.)
* Numbering the kits, and build a database to track where they are going and who is their caretaker at each location.
* Create an application, for schools to use to apply. They need to give us information about their tentative plans for the kits, to tell us they have talked with teachers, principals, and IT staff before the kits come, and to request a general time to receive a kit.
* Created procedures for applying, including setting up webpages with information for members considering the kits.
* Creating procedures for teachers to use in classrooms, for students to use, and for the IT people to use. Trying to anticipate questions and problems is always a challenge, and we anticipate this being a work in progress for the next few months as we update things to meet shifting needs.
* Learning to use the kits, and figuring out strategies for helping library staff, teachers, and students to use the portal and the headsets. There are approximately 700 lessons they will be able to choose, across a bunch of topics including Art, Biology, Drama, Theater, and Performing Arts, Mathematics, and Geography. Figuring out how all this works is a challenge! It’s going to be pretty easy for people to use once we get the hang of it, but the process to get there is hard.
* Hired a contract employee to fill the five-hour-a-week position funded by the grant. Annie Larson joined us this week; she was a librarian at Great River, and now works at St. Ben’s/St. John’s. She brings experience in working with technology, some classroom work, and several years as a librarian.

It’s been a very full and productive summer!