

# I Love My Librarian!

Award

## **Award Nomination: Tammi Moe**

Octavia Fellin Public Library

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Tammi Moe places the wellbeing of our community members above all other things and works tirelessly to bring respect, encourage hope, and create agency for all. Our community is the quintessential American melting pot with a diverse representation of cultures, ethnicities, religions, backgrounds, and viewpoints. Gallup is the county seat of McKinley County located in northwestern New Mexico with a total landmass of 5,455 square miles. Gallup's modern history begins as a railroad town built during the westward expansion in the late nineteenth-century and is surrounded by indigenous reservations created during the colonization of the Southwest. The tribes here in the Four Corners area form the largest concentration of indigenous Americans in the United States, covering 15,144 square miles and includes the Navajo Nation, Zuni, Hopi, Acoma, and Laguna Pueblos. According to the most recent Annual Estimates of the Resident Population, our community is 77% Native American. The remaining 23% include mixtures of Hispanic, Latino, Mexican, Caucasian, African American, Asian, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hawaiian, and Puerto Rican. This blend of cultures has been present in Gallup for generations however, there is no dominant culture here. The majority remains underrepresented and underserved existing on the fringes of modern society. "The Navajo Nation estimates that up to 30% of the population (approximately 54,000 people) do not have piped water to their homes. " Generational trauma is ever-present and manifests in various ways creating deep social issues and obstacles to healing. Tammi approaches every day with an open heart and desire to serve our community members many needs. Believing that meaningful learning takes place through storytelling and conversation, Tammi has successfully developed community-wide engagement through library programming and services. Dedicated to creating agency for every person that she encounters inside and outside of the library walls. She has been credited with bringing the library to the people. The role of the library has taken on a new life outside of traditional library boundaries. Tammi has worked with the OFPL team to curate experiences and expand library programs focusing on socially relevant issues, generational experiences, and opportunities for open-dialogue; often for sensitive topics that are not easily discussed. Tammi is not afraid to speak up and her willingness to put herself out there has inspired many staff and community members to open up and share their experiences with others. The

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impact of this more curated approach is quantifiable with program attendance continuing to climb. The library's annual reports show OFPL sponsored programs have steadily increased over the last two years with 307 programs in 2017-18 with 8,233 attendees to 534 programs in 2018-19 with 11,602 attendees. Tammi strives to increase awareness of and make library services more accessible to the people by pushing the diverse resources of a 21st-century library beyond the walls of the building. OFPL brings interactive library programs to local events including community festivals, health fairs, career days, arts crawl, game nights, as well as providing learning opportunities through youth internships and programs for entrepreneurs. Taking the library to the people would not be possible without the support of community partners. Tammi has forged strong partnerships with other City departments, community organizations, and community activists. Partnerships which catalyze community wellbeing through the unique strengths of each partner. In 2018 Tammi completed the McKinley Leadership Program which strengthened her leadership networks and mobilized many of the broader partnerships which she now relies upon. Specific challenges faced Gallup-McKinley County is home to a largely marginalized community that continues to suffer the generational traumas of colonization and who have faced the abuses of the Federal Government's "Indian Policies." Tammi recognizes that true healing will only be possible when indigenous people are able to decolonize their histories and regain control of their narratives. The goal is to restore respect and hope for a community that so often has none. US News & World Report ranking the best states "measuring outcomes for citizens using 70 metrics," the state of New Mexico is 49th in both education and crime, 48th in opportunity, and 47th in the economy and fiscal stability. New Mexico has two cities listed in USA Today's article "These are the 25 worst US Cities to Raise Children." This reality often hits close to home for OFPL staff. Last year Tammi shared the last minutes of a young man's life after he was stabbed to death outside of the library over his new shoes. To that end programming that may seem threatening or controversial to the status quo is embraced by the library. Programs that discuss the forced sterilization of indigenous women, the abduction of indigenous children and forced assimilation that took place in more than 350 Indian Boarding Schools, the incarceration and murder of indigenous activist such as Leonard Peltier, John Trudell, and Red Fawn who fought to protect their heritage and the natural resources that we often take for granted. Tammi believes in the value of one and the power of all, she is not afraid to stand for what is right in the face of opposition. Community Impact Tammi's leadership is kind, supportive, engaged, and thoughtful. She has dissolved the walls of the library creating

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a community platform for healing and cultural understanding through shared experiences.

Second nomination: A Discussion of Tammi Moe, Director of the Octavia Fellin Public Library, in Gallup, New Mexico

Gallup is a city of about 22,000 - and has the only public library in a region of many hundreds of thousands. The population of "Gallup" increases to about 100,000 on Saturdays. But the use of the library, by the entire region, continues all week long. I will, in this discussion, make clear what Tammi Moe faced, as she entered this community. I will then detail what she has done about it all. I myself am age 73, have taught in the Masters Degree Program at a major university, and have been on the undergraduate faculty at two other colleges. Summary: In addition to creating a superb public library, by ANY standards, Tammi Moe has quickly and successfully understood the innate situation of our unusual region - and has brought people together in a large collaborative spirit, to confront the issues that have affected us for so long. She has done this without getting fired, which is a miracle enough. But she has also managed to address difficult topics without creating or resurrecting old hatreds - which is an additional miracle. In fact - it feels to me, that ALL peoples are coming together, in a new way. This is the biggest miracle of all. A Public Library, ideally, is to serve the educational and social needs of the ENTIRE regional population. It can also serve as a facility to create real "COMMUNITY". In the case of THIS region - creating community has some significant obstacles. It is this situation which I wish to discuss in detail. SO ... What did Tammi Moe face - upon entering this regional community? What has she done about that?? I will now identify different segments of the regional community - and discuss how they have been addressed. \_\_ First of all - there is a sizable and present ("in your face") homeless and drunk population. Actual inclusion of the entire public to the Public Library - ANYONE - has been magnificently achieved - by actually welcoming and accommodating these homeless - while making sure that they can and will be respectful, and quiet, so that the work of the others can proceed with grace, and safety. This unusual demonstration of inclusiveness, more impressively accomplished than in any other situation that I have ever seen (including throughout New York City) - makes it crystal clear, to ALL, that ANYONE is welcome in this facility. Quite an achievement. And in doing so - rather than this discouraging the rich and sober from coming, attendance of ALL kinds of people has increased. I've never seen anything quite like this. \_\_ This is a holocaust community - where the largest percentage of the population

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are the INDIGENOUS of the region - including the Navajo and Zuni, as well as many other nearby tribes. These are the people who were systematically wiped out by the European invaders - with extensive comprehensive killing, followed by prison and concentration camps which then became "Reservations" - attempting to "paint" what had happened as a gift - supposedly providing a way for these peoples to 'preserve' their culture - in places "Reserved" for their culture. However, that was certainly not the case. The imprisonment on Reservations was immediately followed by the forcible removal of children from their families, to significantly distant boarding schools, removed from parents and relatives. There, Native culture and religion and language was wiped out - often with brutal punishments (for example, for speaking their own language). These "schools" were actually bald-faced "re-education" camps - indoctrination facilities - run by a great variety of Christian religious denominations, where their own indoctrinated opinions (from their own crippling Christian childhoods) were then peddled to the Native children as "facts". The "schools" were mere instruments of missionary proselytizing. This of course was done contrary to the USA Constitution, and is still in some respects going on today. Later, the kill-off was continued by large powerful corporations (enabled by the USA federal government) to "use" the land that had been given for Reservations - for mining coal and uranium - which left both land and water lethally contaminated, and which has never been cleaned up. The local native workers, as well as their families and all residents, have suffered many debilitating health problems and death. \_ In the ensuing years, many OTHER workers were brought to Gallup, from all over the world, with their OWN different cultures and languages - to build the railroad, and to work in the mines. These cultures also suffered discrimination and humiliation as "second class" citizens. This includes different "native" people who were resident here, BEFORE the Europeans, when the national identity of the area was "Mexico", inhabited by "Mexicans". When the Europeans took this land for themselves, ALL peoples who were not "Anglo" were treated poorly - a practice still felt today, even though Anglos make up a minority of the population. \_ I should also briefly mention that ALL cultures in the mix have themselves each demonstrated similar discriminatory and cruelty practices, towards "others", in their OWN histories. So that even though the more recent atrocities of the "Anglos" are mostly remembered, it is not difficult for EACH culture to "remember" their own similar guilt. And so ... we have here an unusual opportunity for "realization" - and for personal and collective "growth". And, that is what Tammi Moe has rather single-handedly brought into consciousness. Amazingly enough. ===== So ... how, and why

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... has she achieved success? Management Style: You don't see Tammi doing very much. She is normally behind the scenes. I have been in this community for about 13 years - and, I can tell you that there is a VAST difference in the FEELING in the library - that I believe has to do mostly with the FEELING of the employees - the entire staff. They have been "empowered" - to use their innate skills, their innate interests, and their innate affection for the patrons - to address their innate personal wish that the patrons are happy, and, accomplishing something wonderful. Each of the staff develops, it seems to me, their own ideas, often on their own. And they have pride in doing so - which is visible, and palpable. Tammi has also successfully identified and collaborated with the region's strategic long-time leaders and workers in all of the myriads of societal issues. Those people now use the library as a center for their own work - because they sense, accurately, that the library has the same agenda. These leaders bring with them huge numbers of followers and families - who now think of the library as THEIR library. This does not mean that all these people are limited to use the dinky little space that the current library building supplies. Because ... Tammi has been "expansive" in her interpretation of "what is the library". She has been extremely clever in the use of facilities around town. It's almost as if her image of the library IS the town. For example, the work of the library, in addressing culture, now extends into use of the town's movie theater and stage. The feeling, when going to large well-attended library-sponsored performances and showings and meetings and discussions ... is not that the library is "using" the theater ... but that the theater is part of the library. I think everyone feels that. Amazing. No one has ever done that before. Each librarian has chosen to think of "the library" as being its own small building, with limited space, only using THAT space. And as a result, impact upon the region has also been small. This is a whole new world. And because the library is no longer "small" - people have been coming to events in extremely large numbers. Confronting our historical and current very real issues is exactly what Ms. Moe has inaugurated - in an unbelievably effective series of instructive installations/displays, and programs. The Public Library has become a center for deeply probing, for everyone, our entire region - our own history - our own conflicts - and our own individual and collective roles in those conflicts. The deeply embedded issues are exposed, with deep educational programs about each one - often led by the people of the region who have been working on resolutions for their lifetime. Added to all this is a very effective ADVERTISING engine - likely by some of her staff. The programs are VERY well publicized - and, the result is a large attendance that generates an even larger attendance next time. Bravo. Part of the miracle, is that the people who would normally

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fire her, who could "take personally" the issues which are being brought up - see instead that something special is happening. And there is a growing CITY PRIDE in what "The Library" is - and what it is doing. The higher-ups see MANY individuals at work - part of a collective "library" and "regional" spirit. And so, instead of there being a "narrow blame", on Tammi - the effort is instead on the part of many many many people. Tammi works to empower and connect all these people - who were working "alone" before this. The result: it would be difficult to know who to fire. The result is "too large" to be put down with the usual "firing" mentality. This is all good news. I heartily recommend Tammi Moe for your award. Which would help all of us in successfully building a new library building - a facility with which to address and express our growing understanding of our own region, and, what we can accomplish, together.