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Orinda's New Library Manager is One for the Books

By Sora O'Doherty



Sierra Campagna, the new Orinda Community Library Manager, says she feels at home with books. Photo Sora O'Doherty

She recently moved from the Walnut Creek Library to the Orinda Library, where she is the new Senior Community Library Manager. She has been in the Contra Costa Library system for four years. She worked at the Doherty Station Library in San Ramon, where she was the liaison with Diablo Valley College (DVC), and she also worked at DVC in Pleasant Hill as a substitute librarian. She started her master's degree in Library Science in 2008, and has worked in libraries for 15 years, including academic libraries, middle school libraries, and a library at a law firm. People don't realize, she noted, how many libraries exist beyond the public library. Most big companies tend to have libraries, she said.

Campagna likes that there is so much variety and lots of tech in today's librarian's work. She loves helping people connect. She loves working with the public and meeting so many people. She has always been interested in education and believes that education and libraries go hand-in-hand.

At Orinda she manages a staff of seven librarians, library assistants and clerks. They are assisted by volunteers, who operate under a volunteer coordinator. She was attracted to the job in Orinda because it is just the one branch, unlike Walnut Creek's two branches, which she believes will enable her to be more involved in the day-to-day operation of the library. She expects her time to be divided about 50/50 between administrative duties and more creative, consumer-oriented activities.

Libraries are open to all the public; they serve everyone. The library is a safe place, and, as a result, libraries see lots of individuals who are homeless. Some even

Linton Weeks once wrote that, "In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us to swim." Orinda's new Senior Community Library Manager Sierra Campagna hopes that is true.

Before arriving in Orinda, Campagna followed the yellow brick road of vocations, until she clicked her heels and whispered, There's no place like home. Her career took her through various multimedia companies; she worked on editing TV commercials and film. She worked as an audio engineer for Grace Cathedral, for video stores, cafes and did retail. But when it came time for a job change, she asked herself, "Where have I been happiest?" And the answer was, at the library.

As a child Campagna happily wiled away her afternoons at the San Anselmo branch library. She likes hanging out with like-minded people, and librarians are just her type: witty, smart, kind and talented. So she got a degree in library science and started working in libraries - and she loves it.

Campagna lives in Berkeley with her two children, a daughter, 12, and a son, 14, and two cats she describes as "obnoxious and somewhat neurotic."

have mental health issues. Campagna served on the Mental Health Task Team, and focuses on training library staff to recognize and handle mental health issues. The library has a patron conduct policy, and it is very clear what types of behavior are not acceptable. Library staff can ask a patron violating the policy to leave, and the person may be suspended from the library for a day. If the person resists, staff can call upon the police for assistance.

Campagna praised former librarian Beth Grisham, and said that, for now, she wants to keep the library on the same steady course that Grisham set. But she looks forward to being creative, developing innovative ideas and helping with programming big picture fun things and library outreach. She wants to connect with the community and with Orinda schools.

In the 21st century, Campagna believes that libraries have changed dramatically. Libraries advocate for literacy, help people understand new technology, provide a gathering space for people to meet and exchange ideas. In addition, there are so many new online resources that can help if someone wants to learn to drive, learn a foreign language, stream movies, read electronic books or listen to audiobooks. There are resources for students to do research and the librarians are there to help students learn how to navigate the maze of too much information, and think critically about what they read to identify good information versus bad information. The library even provides passes to a variety of museums.

Librarians are popular characters in books and movies, and Campagna loves "Party Girl," an internet film in which becoming a librarian is the answer to the protagonist's problems. Campagna's undergraduate degree was in film. She admits that, while she used to read a ton, she has fallen off a bit lately, but is looking forward to getting back to reading more fiction and nonfiction. She is currently reading "Ruin and Rising," the third book in the Grisha series of young adult books by Leigh Bardugo. Her favorite book is Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice", and her favorite movie based on a book is "To Kill a Mockingbird," based on Harper Lee's novel of the same name.

Professionally she is proud of her work at a middle school in Hayward where she felt she was able to transform the students' views of what a library is: a safe, lively space where the love of reading is encouraged.

Campagna noted that, while circulation is down slightly, library use is going up. "People today suffer from a lack of time," she said. "Librarians can help with that by assisting with research." She thinks that the circulation statistics do not yet take into account online borrowing of e-books and audiobooks. The library provides study programming, free wifi, desks with electrical outlets, and a computer docent if you need help using a computer.

Campagna also addressed the question of inequalities among the residents of different parts of Contra Costa County. She pointed out that books, wherever they are in the library system, are available upon request to any library user in any library. Some books are "ifloats" that live wherever they end up. Thus if a user from one library requests an ifloat book, when that user returns the book to his or her library, it will stay there until it is requested by a user of another library.

The Contra Costa County Library Annual Book Giveaway takes place from Aug. 18 through Sept. 3 from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding Sundays, at the Administration Shipping and Receiving area, 75 Santa Barbara Rd. in Pleasant Hill. Used books no longer needed in the collection are available free while supplies last. A large selection of free paperbacks and hard cover books in all subjects will be sorted into children's, adult fiction and non-fiction.

People who want books should bring boxes or bags. For more information, call (925) 646-6423 or visit www.libadmin@ccclib.org.

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