

Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today. And we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil McKay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

Mary

OK, well this is a special edition of WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories. This is Mary Vermillion. Typically, at this point in the podcast, Neil McKay would be introducing me, saying "I'm here again with my boss, Mary Vermillion." So today I get to say I'm here with my boss Christine Perkins. And this is a special edition because at this time of year, we're all, this is December, we're recording this, we're all possibly sending out greetings to people far and near. And I'm asking you, dear listener, if you will please help me with a gift for Neil. I'm getting all emotional.

Christine

Ohh, do it for Neil. Neil deserves a gift.

Mary

Yes, he does, and it's simple and we can all help.

Christine

OK.

Mary

So please, we, you know, Neil, this is a labor of love for Neil this podcast and he's a professional. He does an amazing job of improving the podcast with each episode. He's even presented how to create a podcast at library conferences across the state. So he's dedicated to making this podcast as good as possible, pleasure for you to listen to and every once in a while he asked people to please send him comments about what you think about the podcast, or maybe what you'd like to hear us talk about on the podcast and every once in a while someone shares a comment, so today I'm here with a special request. For this holiday, please send Neil McKay your thoughts on this podcast. It's easy to do. Just go

to wcls.org/podcast and you'll see his e-mail information there and just send Neil a note. Let him know, what do you think about the podcast? What would you like to hear? What stories are you curious about at the library? Thanks so much for helping me give this gift to Neil, who works so hard to make a great podcast for all of us. So that's my ask and then the second part of today's short podcast is a quick conversation with Christine Perkins, my boss. So hi, Christine.

Christine

Well, hi, Mary. And yes, I'll just reiterate, it would be great to give Neil this gift because he's been gifting us with this podcast for 41 episodes or so...

Mary

Incredible. Yeah.

Christine

...And running so I just know he's always trying to do his best to make it really worthwhile listen, and we can help him out with that.

Mary

Yeah. Absolutely. So, thanks though for coming here today and I'll just say Neil is of course on the other end of this microphone, helping us record this podcast so it's not a surprise, but I did want to just have a few moments with you, Christine, just to look back at 2023 and get your thoughts on what were some of your favorite moments or highlights at the library this year?

Christine

You know, this was a really great year for Whatcom County Library System. I felt like we had some really good momentum going and some fun things happening. And I said several times to staff members, we're cooking with gas now, we're all coming together. People are firing on all cylinders. Whatever metaphor you want to throw in there. I feel like we all came together as a team this year and accomplished so much and a lot of the teamwork was not just with staff members, but with Friends of the Library and community members who are dedicated to the concept of public libraries in our communities. So, way back in January, we partnered with some very dear Friends of the Birch Bay Library to take a road trip down to Olympia to talk to some senators on the Finance Committee, to help convince them that the allocation that they had put forward for a Birch Bay Library project should be reallocated to a project in Birch Bay with a little bit smaller scope and that took a little bit of finesse to do and talking with our various legislative officials, but they did it and it was such a powerful, I guess, example of what people and local communities can do with the support of our elected officials.

Mary

Yeah, I remember that you sent some pictures back from that day and it's, you know, it's just a small mighty crew that drove down there to Olympia and the road trip to Olympia is not a small thing especially in winter.

Christine

No, it was snowing on that day. It was amazing and what I thought was just so great is our Whatcom County Representatives down in Olympia were so helpful to us, Senator Sharon Shewmake helped us put the whole thing together. We met with Representative Joe Timmons. We spoke with aides from Representative Alicia Rules office. They just really understood the value of the Birch Bay Library project, and were helping us to communicate that to the other colleagues right in Olympia.

Mary

Right. And I think one thing that made it so powerful was yes, you were there representing the library system administration, but it was community members who went with you, three community members from Birch Bay who were like, we have a dream. We want this library.

Christine

Sure, we, Doralee Booth was one of the folks that joined us representing both the Friends of the Library and the Chamber of Commerce. Diane Marrs-Smith from the chamber, the Friends and the Library System. We also went down with Ted and just all of these people really care deeply about their community in Birch Bay, but also bringing a library to that community and I think that's what was so resonant with the people we spoke with and convincing and it worked because we were able to secure that funding for the Birch Bay Library, which was great.

Some other wonderful moments, the Sumas Library reopened after quite a few months closed. It took a long time for us to rebuild after the flooding that happened at the end of 2021. Supply chain issues and insurance claims and all of that stuff really took a toll, but our staff kept working on it in partnership with the City of Sumas, our great Sumas branch manager and staff worked hard on this, along with our facility staff, so it was just really heartwarming to open again and to listen to the Sumas residents who were there celebrating the opening of their library.

Mary

Yeah, that ribbon cutting was really fun, cause yes, the library was open and it almost felt like Sumas was reopening in some ways, you know, I mean, there's still a lot of recovery there. We acknowledge the pain of that community and the growth in the recovery that they're still undergoing, but so many people came out just to be there.

Christine

Right.

Mary

Right, community, you know.

Christine

Well, and I heard from one person that the library symbolized that there was still a future in the community and that that folks from outside of the community believed in the future of Sumas and the importance and the needs of the Sumas residents and I felt great that we're able to fulfill that for them.

Mary

That was a fun night. That was a good highlight from 2023. What else?

Christine

Oh, absolutely. So let's see, technology is a big thing. We really acknowledge and understand that there are people in our community who do not have good access to high-speed internet in their homes. And sometimes that's because literally the cable does not go from the road to their house. Sometimes it's you can't get a signal, no matter what. There's lots of hills and valleys out there.

Mary

Right.

Christine

And it can be challenging, and sometimes it's because that Internet service is costly and people just can't afford it. So we're really grateful to our Branch Manager out at the North Fork Library, Katrina Buckman, who helped put together a Wi-Fi hotspot lending program. So, we now have 22 Wi-Fi hotspots that people can check out and bring home or bring on the road with them as they're traveling to use and get access to the internet and really power whatever they need to data wise remotely so.

Mary

Maybe something that would surprise people that the library offers, but a testament to just the impact the library can have on people lives, yeah.

Christine

Absolutely right. It's not a, you're not borrowing a book, you're buying, borrowing the...

Mary

Ability to connect, yeah.

Christine

...whole wide web of worth of books and information and the ability to connect with people. That's a really powerful thing, right? And people have discovered that, I have checked our catalog to see if they're ever available. They're constantly on hold for people. And they are being delivered all over the county. So it's not just people up in the Kendall Maple Falls area who are borrowing them. They're in Blaine. They're in Lummi Island and Point Roberts, they're down in Sudden Valley. So, we know that people with the need for Wi-Fi access exist all over Whatcom County, and we're happy to be able to serve them in this way.

Mary

That's great. Those are three highlights. Do you have anything else you want to share?

Christine

Ohh, tons. OK. Just some, couple quickies I'll go through. Some anniversary celebrations. It was the 20th anniversary of the Lynden Library.

Mary

Whoo. Yeah, that was fun.

Christine

So fun to celebrate that.

Mary

We went out to that for that. That was great.

Christine

Absolutely. And one thing from that I really enjoyed was the daughter of the man for whom the building is named came out to be part of that celebration.

Mary

Yeah, she lived in the Seattle area, right, and drove up for the event? Yeah.

Christine

Exactly. Yeah. So her father, Arthur Henken, was on the Lynden City Council and was very active at the time the library was being built and was a big supporter of it. And so, the city of Lynden chose to honor him by naming the building the Arthur Henken Building after him, which is just great. On Lummi Island, they had an anniversary too. I think it was the 30-year anniversary of Snap E. Dragon, who's their unofficial mascot out there. And if you've ever gotten off the ferry in Lummi Island, you've seen this cut out, giant cut out, of a colorful dragon, Snappy, and he's just a great way to welcome kids and families to the library. Mm-hmm. They had a celebration for him out there. Speaking of celebrations and parties, Whatcom Grooves was another great partnership with all of our Friends of the Library. They put together a series of jazz concerts. There was one in Glenhaven, one in Ferndale, one up in Blaine, and so people who enjoy jazz got a real treat. Could have attended one or all of those concerts, and we're really grateful to the Friends for having the vision to be that.

Mary

Yeah, yeah, they were all so different and wonderful. And each of them had something special. I loved the Ferndale one, cause it was inside the library and it's so great to see people sitting among the stacks and listening to the trio, it was really fantastic.

Christine

And a beautiful spot there in the library and you can get a view out on the marsh and maybe see Mount Baker in the distance and.

Mary

And see deer in the windows. Neil got pictures of a couple of deer who wandered by. Yeah, yeah.

Christine

Ohh that's so cool. Yeah, with the music of jazz in the soundtrack. Yeah.

Mary

Everybody loves jazz.

Christine

Yeah. So, the last big celebration, which I just loved was our Open Book event. Our first ever festival celebrating books, reading, everything book-ish and it was so much fun. Mary, you really had a lot to do with the vision for that event and pulling it off. And I think so many staff members participated in it. To me that was the best part, was seeing the creativity of our staff members and the joy they took in showing all the cool things that the library does to the community at large, followed by the joy of all the people attending the festival, just getting it and digging it and staying for a long time. You know, the parking lot was jammed. It was out at that Ferndale Events Center. And you know, around 800 people hanging out, enjoying books, reading, libraries on a Sunday afternoon, I think is just fantastic.

Mary

We're doing it again. We're gonna do it November 3rd in 2024. So.

Christine

Absolutely. I mean, when you've got a good thing going, you want to keep that going.

Mary

Right, absolutely. I know there's a lot to say. Those are a few of the highlights. Anything you are particularly looking forward to in 2024 or you want people listening to know, "Hey, here's something to look for at the library in 2024".

Christine

We've got a lot of things cooking. A big one is that we are looking for an architectural firm to do the final design drawings and construction documents to go out to bid for the Birch Bay Library. So that has been many years in the works and we're really excited for that to come together. We've got projects all over the county, lots of things happening. Open Book again. We've got Whatcom Reads celebrating *Red Paint*.

Mary

Mm-hmm.

Christine

So that will be a good one by Sasha Lapointe. So, really, there's a lot happening. I hope people will go to our website wcls.org and look at our events page to avail themselves of all of the fun things going on.

Mary

Come to any branch and just talk to the staff, they. This time of year is a great time to just celebrate the people we work with, the people who are there at each of the library branches. They're wonderful folks to talk to if you're looking for a book recommendation or you need help with technology, or you need a connection with something in the community area, looking for that next great event, or a book club, whatever it may be.

Christine

Or you want to connect with other people? So, that's my last thing was I got to go to a Community Conversations event up at the North Fork Library in Kendall and they have them monthly. There's a potluck gathering in the evening, and people get together and talk about interesting conversational topics and there are people who really have made some new friendships based on meeting people at the library and I think all those kind of opportunities could happen at every one of our libraries and I just want to shout out to people who are feeling maybe a little lonely or feeling like they could use a new friend or want some more purpose in their life to visit their library and talk to the staff and get connected either with a Friends group or some of our activities and programs. There's always some great opportunities for connection.

Mary

That sounds like, not everybody's a resolution maker, but if you're looking for a resolution for 2024 get involved with your library.

Christine

Absolutely.

Mary

Good thing to do for 2024. OK, before, we'll close out, but we always like to ask, do you have any book recommendations you'd like to share?

Christine

I do. I've got two. So one, just cause I'll start with a serious topic. You know, fentanyl use and opioid epidemic is really in the news a lot lately and I read *Least of Us* by Sam Quinones, and it is about the rise of fentanyl and methamphetamine and how this version of the opioid epidemic right now is so serious and so different from maybe the use of heroin in the past or different formulations of methamphetamine and it's really converging at exactly the same time, which makes it doubly difficult to address and problematic, and we know that it affects us here and Whatcom County. So, it was really interesting to read about this and try to get some insights about what's happening and what we might do about this.

And I read that at the same time I was reading Barbara Kingsolver's book *Demon Copperhead*, which is a fictionalized account of a character who accidentally becomes addicted to opioids. And so that really just puts more of the, you know, it's fiction, but it gives you insights into people's psyches and how

devastating it can be in affecting people's lives so, that, those are the two that are kind of enmeshed in my mind.

But, then I, when I read heavy books like that, I need a palette cleanser. I need something light to kind of balance it out and you would, it's strange to say that a murder mystery would be light, but I just finished *Everybody in my Family has Killed Someone*. And that is set in Australia in a remote ski lodge. A family goes there for a reunion. One of the brothers has just been released from prison and then a body is discovered. Yeah, you know, and it's snowing and no one can leave. You know all of the tropes from Agatha Christie, but in modern times and the main character is just so sassy and snarky and kind of hilarious and so. It is quite entertaining and if you like *Knives Out* or any of those kind of modern retakes on a murder-mansion-who-done-it this is it.

Mary

Great tips. Thank you.

Christine

Yeah. You're welcome.

Mary

Great. Well, wonderful to spend a little time with you today and everybody listening happy holidays. And one more time, please help us give a gift to Neil. Share your thoughts about this podcast. Tell us what you like. Tell us what you'd like to hear. Maybe you have a story idea. Maybe you'd like to be on the podcast. Just send us a note or just tell Neil, "Hey, Neil. Great job. I'm listening". He'd love to know that.

Christine

Neil, great job. I'm listening.

Mary

So again, just go to wcls.org/podcast and you'll see Neil's contact information there. So happy holidays, everyone. Happy reading.

Neil

Thank you for listening to a very special end of year episode. I'd like to thank our guests, Christine Perkins, Executive Director of the Whatcom County Library System. And of course, thanks to my boss, Mary Vermillion. In seed time, learn, in harvest, teach, in winter, enjoy. Hey, if you enjoy this podcast, or even if you don't, I'd love it if you drop me a quick note letting me know you are listening. You can find my e-mail address on the podcast web page at wcls.org/podcast. This is our last podcast for 2023. I'm thankful for the opportunity to capture so many good library memories for us all to enjoy whenever we want. I want to wish you health and happiness for the coming new year, and remember that you are among friends at the library.