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Amy Zeigler

Pikes Peak Library District

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Putting Out The Welcome Mat: Archival Outreach in the Public Library Environment

Amy Zeigler, Archivist, Pikes Peak Library District

Pikes Peak Library District in Colorado Springs, Colorado, boasts two main libraries, ten branches, three bookmobiles, and did I mention a fantastic archives collection? The archives is a surprise and a hidden gem for most individuals visiting the public library. Special Collections is located in a beautifully restored 1905 Carnegie Library, which is attached to the Penrose Library built in 1969. By having Special Collections located near several other library services, it provides ample opportunities for outreach. The children's department is located above the archives and the computer lab and law library are located below. As a result we have several patrons visiting Special Collections for the first time with different needs and expectations.

Pikes Peak Library District serves a population of approximately 530,000 with a large military presence and several individuals who are not native to the area. With a large percentage of our patrons not calling Colorado Springs home, and our collection focusing on local history, it creates a challenge to excite local history enthusiasm. Thus, the question becomes how can we attract members of the community from all age groups and get them excited about archives?

Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library provides programming that attracts non-traditional users of archives. What is a non-traditional user? The term is used in Special Collections to mean any individual who has never used an archive, before, such as children, teens, and inexperienced adults.

For our youngest patrons, tours provide a brief overview of Special Collections for elementary school students and even cub scouts. Probably the most exciting part of the tour for this age group is cranking the compact shelving back and forth and not necessarily viewing our collections. The intention is not finding aid instruction or even an introduction to provenance and original order, but creating an experience that provides a reference point for archives research and a fond memory of their trip to the archives. Sometimes it can be difficult to target material for younger children. However, the benefits are great with this age group because they often bring their parents back on their next trip to the library.

When working with teenagers, Special Collections has developed a research experience for them and introduced them to the profession. The research experience was designed for high school seniors from Calhan, Colorado, a small rural town east of Colorado Springs. Two collections were available to the students after brief bibliographic instruction on finding aids and handling instructions. One collection was the Banning-Lewis Ranch Collection and the other was the Chase Stone Papers, an early Colorado Springs businessman and WWI and WWII veteran. The students had a fantastic time as they explored the collections, inquired about materials and donors and practiced using a finding aid and requesting materials.

Another program developed for teens through the public school system is Job Shadow Day, which engages local 8th graders in Colorado Springs. The children are divided into groups and spend the day at a variety of institutions. The library is one lucky stop. Children are divided into different areas of library services including circulation, children's services, interlibrary loan and Special Collections. During our time with the students, it is a chance to explain the profession, demonstrate our job

duties, and provide an overall introduction to archives. After we have met as a small group, all students come together to discuss their experience in the various departments and also practice interviewing skills.

Job Shadow Day has not been our only collaborative effort with local schools. In 2008 Pikes Peak Library District became involved in the Teaching American History Grant. This three-year project involves three archival repositories in Colorado Springs including: Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado College, and the Colorado Springs Pioneer Museum. Local middle school and high school teachers utilize the local archival collections to select primary source documents that become the basis of lesson plans. The primary sources they select must come from the three local repositories and must include several formats including photographs, ephemera, newspaper clippings, correspondence, etc. Each year the teachers focus on a different theme. Past themes included "liberty and equality" and "crossroads." These lesson plans are then compiled into a text, which is uploaded onto the Pikes Peak Library District's eBranch. Anyone can utilize the resource, making it ideal for other educators, homeschooling parents, or anyone with a public library card.

To appeal to requests for film, Special Collections created a movie night titled "Reel History." Digitized films from the collection were identified for viewing. With the aid of the library's Video Production Center, a compilation of snippets from various 1930s films were produced, complete with commercials from a local film company. Guests enjoyed reminiscing with each other while enjoying popcorn, soda, and candy.

The largest event that Special Collections organizes is the annual Pikes Peak Regional History Symposium. The past six years has provided programming on a variety of topics including: The Colorado Labor Wars; city founder General William Jackson Palmer; explorer Zebulon Montgomery Pike; Extraordinary Women of the Rocky Mountain West; Doctors, Disease and Dying; and the 1859 Pikes Peak or Bust Gold Rush. This all day event of speakers includes a complimentary lunch as well as an authors wine reception at the end of the day. The library's video center staff tapes all symposiums. It is broadcast live on the local library cable channel, and provides more television programming throughout the year. The video is also available for checkout on the library's eBranch. For those that would rather read about it, each symposium is followed with a publication of the papers presented. These books are available in the library in print as well as in electronic form on the eBranch, and also newly available for purchase for the Kindle, from Amazon.com, and as PDF downloads from Scribd.com. At the moment there are four books available.

Special Collections has received grant funding for the symposium from Colorado Humanities, which provides stipends to speakers. We also have several sponsors and partners. Since 2004 Special Collections has received financial sponsorship from Colorado Humanities, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, and the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum and the Pikes Peak Library District Foundation. Partners include: Friends of the Pikes Peak Library District, Historic Preservation Alliance, Pikes Peak Community College, Pikes Peak Posse of the Westerners, United States Air Force Academy, University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, and the Western Museum of Mining and Industry.

The symposium has shaped many individual's work. For instance, the archivist organizes her processing plan based on the subject of the symposium. All collections that pertain to the following year's symposium are identified as high priority for processing. Of course, not all processing can keep up with each year's topic. However, it remains a goal of the archivist. The photo archivist on staff curates a large exhibit to correspond with the symposium and also designs the cover of the symposium books and promotional items. The Special Collections Manager commits a large

amount of work to editing and compiling the symposium books and overseeing the entire event.

The symposium involves the collaboration of several individuals. Many departments within the library district participate to complete the successful event. The Video Production Center tapes and broadcasts the event. The PPLD Foundation Office focuses on grant funding. The Community Relations Office aids in promotion of the event. The IT department designs a website for patrons to register for the symposium. There is also a large contribution of help from outside institutions, who serve on the symposium committee. Even several volunteers from the public are recruited to make sure that the day is a success and every one of the 225 guests in attendance has an excellent experience.

From these outreach experiences there are several implications. One of the most satisfying outcomes is seeing patrons come back, whether it is a child bringing back their parent or a symposium attendee that wants to view our resources. We have also received donations from individuals through outreach and enjoy their realization that "You want this stuff?" Since 2006, when most of these programs started, there has been an increase in visitors. The total number of patrons walking through the archives door has increased 12% from 2006 to 2008. In addition there are a number of online resources that patrons utilize.

Of course there are also a few drawbacks to conducting large amounts of outreach. When spending time organizing outreach events, other job duties are neglected. For instance, processing, exhibit design, administrative work, collection development, etc. However, the trade off can often times be positive in unexpected ways, such as a new donation or new advocates for the collection. Also, expectations from those requesting events can be unrealistic. For instance, sometimes individuals or groups request a program with very short notice, not realizing the amount of preparation time required.

Internal outreach is sometimes neglected due to the emphasis on external outreach. Within the library district a large percentage of the staff work at branches and are unaware of the resources offered in Special Collections. Cross training in archives would benefit staff members on the reference desk and consequently enhance the customer service experience for patrons. However, with large workloads and hectic schedules it can be difficult to accomplish.

Overall, outreach in the public library has been a rewarding and positive experience for patrons and archivists. Patrons discover resources that they may not have known existed. Archivists establish community connections, introduce the next generation to the profession, increase statistics and cultivate donors. Often times by trial and error, archivists can create exceptional programming at their institution and welcome unexpected benefits such as donations, advocates, and community relationships.

Amy Ziegler, CA is an archivist in Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District. She received her bachelors in History from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma. She has also received her Masters in Information Science from the University of Texas at Austin. Previously she worked as the Professional Touring Entertainment Archives intern at the Center for American History in Austin, Texas.
