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Episode 6: Branch Out Mobile Library and Library Foundation News

A; Hello and welcome to *We LOVE the Library*, a twice-monthly podcast brought to you by the San Luis Obispo County Library Foundation. I'm your host, Rachel Duchak. In this sixth episode, we'll speak with Jackie Kinsey, Outreach Coordinator for the SLO County Library System. Jackie will explain the difference between a bookmobile and a mobile library, describe the library-by-mail program for homebound adults, and highlight several other ways she's helping bring the library to all of us through the Branch Out program. Then, we'll meet Jay Capell, the newest member of our SLO County Library Foundation Board of Directors. We'll learn about his work with libraries when he was living in the greater Los Angeles area, and why and how he wants to continue to strengthen people's connection to the public library. Finally, our Library Foundation President, Julianne McAdam, highlights a special Library Foundation project that helped honor Frances Margaret Milne, the first librarian of the San Luis Obispo Library. The Library Foundation and the SLO County Library staff worked together to raise the funds to install a proper headstone for this important person in San Luis Obispo's intellectual history. As we hear from Jackie, Jay, and Julianne, please remember that this episode is brought to you by the letter J. Thanks for supporting your public library. Well, we are here this morning with Jackie Kinsey, the Outreach Coordinator for the San Luis Obispo County Library System. Hi, Jackie.

B: Hi, Rachel.

A: How are you doing?

B: I'm good. How are you?

A: I'm good, thanks. Thanks for meeting with me. You're the Outreach Coordinator, and right before we started recording, I said, you are the perfect guest because you are doing what we're hoping to do with this podcast, is get out into the community and share information about the library.

B: Exactly. I hear it every time I go out. 'I didn't know that was there. I didn't know you did that.' So, I'm excited to be here, too.

A: Excellent. So, let's just begin with, this is a fairly new position that you've only been in this position for about a year?

B: Almost two years.

A: Almost two years. Tell us about why the Outreach Coordinator is a position that was developed, and how are you approaching it?

B: I believe, well, in 2020, we received the three outreach vans that we have throughout the system, and we were using them very little because there was not a designated person to maintain them, run them, set up programs outside the libraries. So, about two years ago, I was invited to move from the manager of San Luis Obispo building itself to start this new position as Outreach Coordinator. It was very exciting because I like to go out and meet people. I like to brag about the library and the services and invite people in and stuff like that. So, it's been a good fit for me right now.

A: Awesome. That's great. So, these three outreach vans, this is part of the branch out program. Is that correct?

B: Each van is labeled with that phrase, "Branch Out," following off the term of twigs that we used to call the very small branches. So, they're now called the Express branches, I believe. But it's just a fun catchphrase to try to emphasize that the library is coming out to the people, out to the communities, and bringing almost anything they can acquire or obtain at the main buildings out in their communities.

A: Great. So, this is different than the bookmobile. Like, when I was younger, I was familiar with that term. It was like a bus that had a bunch of books on it. So, this mobile library is, can you tell us the difference between a mobile library and the bookmobile?

B: Sure. The mobile library, I believe, is a newer term that's come up nationwide because you can basically get more items and more materials on a mobile library.

A: Including a library card.

B: Including a library card.

A: Wow. Because you have Wi-Fi.

B: We have Wi-Fi now, and internet. So, it's accessible to immediately give a person a card. So, a Branch Out mobile library, at least in San Luis County's terms, is a vehicle that comes out to the community and provides these services. A bookmobile, as we had when I first got here, was a big bus in which patrons could walk onto the bus and pick what they want and learn about library services. So, these vehicles we have now, patrons do not get on them. We pull everything off. We have pop-up tents. We have tables. We have chairs. We can do programs. So, we're more than just checking out the books that were on the bookmobile.

A: Right. And you can also have a lot more people enjoy that space and the library services when you're not having to cram yourselves into one bus.

B: Right. And we are so fortunate to be on the Central Coast and be able to do a lot of this outside.

A: Right. Great. And so, that's super interesting. Another thing that I'm really interested to learn more about is the Library by Mail program, which is funded by the San Luis Obispo County Library Foundation.

B: Yes.

A: Our board funds this every year for the Library by Mail. And tell us about this.

B: Sure.

A: How does this program work?

B: Okay. So, Library by Mail is a mailing service for, and it started out for, offered to seniors age 65 and up that did not have a way to either physically get themselves to a library or have a proctor or other person go there for them. So, within the past two years, though, we've expanded it to 65 plus or other persons without a way to access library resources. They receive library materials, all kinds, books, movies, audiobooks, magazines, music. I even offer reference services if they're looking for something on the intranet that

they need, and so printout services. And they all go in, I have a bag here. It's a heavy canvas.

A: Looks like one of those bags you drop off your money to the bank in.

B: Right. Except it's a little bigger. This one's a small one, and then I have a bigger one. I can send out about four decent novels in this bag, and then the bigger one I can send out about eight, maybe six, six to eight, but lots of movies. I have one customer that just does movies and music all the time, and I just stuff them for her. So, they are mailed, and they are USPS heavy-duty bags, so they are approved by the mail service. And the front has a label pocket, and one side of the card that goes into the label has the patron's address on it, and then when they're done with it, they take out, when they're done with their material inside, they take out the label, flip it over, and there's already a label on that side, so it will come back to me. All they have to do is put it out for their postal person. Hopefully they are friends with their postal person, and everything gets checked back in when it comes back to me.

A: Perfect. No cost to the consumer, no cost to the user.

B: Right, this all gets postage paid as I take it over to the mail room.

A: And we were just in a meeting the other day for the Library Foundation, and someone was talking about issues with a person who's in a wheelchair temporarily with a health issue, having difficulty getting to the library, and it's like, that's the answer, is you can use, that person can use library by mail.

B: Yes, absolutely, even if it's a temporary situation.

A: Great, that's such a great thing. I also heard that the outreach coordinator, that you have some programs with two very different locations. One is with the schools, and one is with the jails, so let's talk about how the library is working with populations in those two different places.

B: Sure, so schools, you know, schools and libraries have always kind of coordinated together or impacted each other some way. So we do have schools that come to the libraries, but more and more we're going out to provide a story time, to provide engagement services for the high schoolers. So we do have librarians and other staff that do that regularly, monthly, if not bi-monthly.

A: So you're going into the schools with doing, like we would have story time in the libraries.

B: Yeah, mostly that's the youth librarians that are doing that, but I do help them in any way if they need my outreach services, maybe for some materials or supplies or something that they're doing, yeah.

A: Because not every school has a librarian.

B: No, and one of the ones that we're very proud to be engaging with now is Lopez High School, which is an alternative school in Arroyo Grande, and their librarian was eager to have them experience filling out an application properly and having the responsibility follow through with doing this process of finding books that they enjoy, reading material that enjoy, and like I said, the responsibility of obtaining them and returning them. So it's been a good experience for both ends.

A: And knowing how to, and being a good citizen with your library card and returning your books so your neighbors can use them as well, is a key part of being a useful adult.

B: And that kind of slides into the jail library program.

A: Okay.

B: Yeah, a couple years ago, actually it's been about five or six years before I was involved with it, we made an understanding with the Sheriff's Department and came to help them with their need of having to have library services, book, or access to books to the inmates. So we were able to build a collection of donations at a small room over near the jail, and three days a month, staff and I go over there, pull books, and deliver them throughout the jail system.

A: So do people in the jail system have access to a catalog that they can search?

B: No, not yet. That's on the design of making some sort of catalog or some sort of online request form. Right now we do it in paper forms. The program manager at the jail provides the inmates with the request forms, and then we get them either on Thursday or Friday and pull from the, like I said, the donation collections that we have of books, all kinds of genres, and magazines.

A: Awesome. One of the first big powerful books I read when I was in college, I believe, was the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and his story about learning to read while he was in prison, using the dictionary, and just how it opened up the world for him. So books and libraries are key for so many populations. You kind of, your outreach coordinator position sounds like it reaches the largest breadth of populations of anybody, of anybody else in the system.

B: I hope so. Yeah, well I have a little history of working with, in all the areas of libraries, so.

A: You are the perfect person for this position. How great. Well thank you so much for telling us about the outreach coordinator position and all of these different programs, and if we wanted to learn more, where could we learn more about these programs?

B: At our website SLOLibrary.org. There is information there about Library by Mail and some of these other programs. If not, they can call me at (805) 781-5184.

A: Okay, great. And if you go to that SLOLibrary.org website, it looks like the catalog, but you were pointing out to me that if you look over to the right, there's the little hamburger.

B: You call it a hamburger icon.

A: It's got three black lines and horizontal lines that look like a hamburger, and then you can open that menu up, and that's where you can see Library by Mail, which has your contact information on that page and all kinds of other information.

B: Hopefully coming in the near future, I'll have my own separate webpage, not mine, I'm sorry, outreach library website with all these other stops that we

have, like two senior facilities and some upcoming places that maybe we'll talk about in the future.

A: Oh, that sounds great. Good. We've got our first cliffhanger for the podcast! Thank you so much, Jackie.

B: You're welcome, Rachel.

A: Coming up next on *We Love the Library*, we meet Jay Capell, the newest member of our Slo County Library Foundation Board of Directors. Hi, everybody. We are here with Jay Capell, my newest colleague on the board of the San Luis Obispo County Library Foundation. How are you, Jay? I'm good. I'm good.

C: Thank you for having me. I'm glad to be part of this.

A: Awesome. Thank you for coming to join us on *We LOVE the Library*, and that's usually the last question I ask people, but I'm going to start with asking you, what do you love about the library?

C: Oh, how to make this short, where to start. I grew up in rural Connecticut. We did not have, at the time, any public libraries that were accessible. But in the center of my little town, a woman converted the first floor of her Victorian home, mostly with her private collection, and ran that as our little community public library. That's where I grew up. I spent a lot of time. Just fast forward, when I moved to Los Angeles, I ended up serving as the union rep for the LA County Library system and got much more involved there, ended up leading a campaign against library privatization.

A: What does library privatization mean?

C: So there is a company called, I don't know what they call themselves now, corporate PR and all that, but there is a company out of Delaware called LSSI that got their start just basically getting work subcontracted to them in big, especially initially governmental libraries, think DC, right? Like everything else in the world, private equity got involved, so they had pressure to grow and make more money. Their first big privatization was actually Riverside County. Riverside County libraries have been privatized, aka for profit, for quite some time. And then they started going after cities that tended to have governments, more conservative governments and elected officials that favored privatization. And so at the time, the city of Santa Clarita voted to privatize their three county libraries. And it's everything that I think those of us who've dealt with this in other areas would expect, right? So in order to create that profit, the first thing that goes are programs. I think anybody who uses a library these days understands that in many ways the programs and services are-

A: It's like the soul of the library.

C: They are. They're more important and in my experience, more heavily utilized than just the books and the DVDs and the kind of hardbound stuff of traditional libraries, if you will. So that's the first thing that gets cut. The other thing that disappeared overnight were all the volunteers, which is really sad. People spent decades volunteering. Nobody's going to volunteer for a for-profit corporation, right? It just doesn't, on the face of it, make sense.

A: I hadn't even thought about that.

C: Makes perfect sense. That disappeared overnight. Staff got slashed.

And then obviously of the staff who remained, the pay and benefits got slashed, right? And it's hard enough to recruit dedicated people into public service as it is. And so now you just lost even more, right? Because they can go other places. So it was a really sad situation.

A: That's great that you are someone who was interested in resisting a tendency towards that privatization of the public library.

C: And you've seen, it's come up recently in the Huntington Beach. There was an effort to do it there. That was also combined with some of the censorship issues we're dealing with in libraries where the effort there was really about getting around the union of the library workers to silence them so they wouldn't keep speaking up about the censorship issues. So there's an added layer in the Huntington Beach situation. But I think we're lucky in California. For the most part, we don't have to deal with a lot of that. I've attended some national, both the Public Library Association and American Library Association conference since the last few years. And it's really difficult to hear what a lot of our public library staff are having to deal with. They're having to spend so much time and energy fighting back against censorship issues, privatization issues, that it takes away from the ability to do the real work that needs to be done. The literacy, helping our youth navigate. I don't think people realize how much work librarians do helping youth navigate online, giving them the ability to become critical thinkers so they can navigate, okay, how do I determine what information is real and legitimate versus AI? I catch myself these days, right? You watch something in the first few seconds, you're like, okay. And then you're just, eh, not so much.

A: Yes. Younger listeners to this podcast, when we were growing up, Jay and I, we look to be about approximately the same age or so. But we did not have the internet. You did not have to wonder if something that you were coming across was-

C: We had the encyclopedia.

A: Was designed to fool you, right? You did have to turn to the encyclopedia, and that's why for a lot of people, going to the library was a doorway into other worlds where you could dip into research. Well, I am so glad that you're bringing this kind of energy to our library foundation board. It's a good group of people, and I think it's, like you, it's an important topic, an important thing to protect. Now, you are from Los Angeles area. You were there for a while.

C: Yeah. I grew up in New England in Connecticut. I moved to Los Angeles in 04. Okay.

A: That's when I moved out here to California.

C: Okay. Yeah. I lived in Los Angeles for quite a long time. Unfortunately, fell victim to the Eaton fire earlier this year.

A: That's terrible.

C: Yeah. But I have an amazing partner who took me in as a refugee, if you will. She was living in Pismo Beach at the time. Thank you, Elena, for that.

And then back in May, we decided to move to San Luis Obispo. So I've been in SLO since May officially. Yeah. And almost immediately, I'd like to get involved wherever I'm living. I feel like it's also a good way to meet the community, get involved.

A: You sound like you have some plans for 2026 about how to help people connect to the library and stay connected.

C: Yeah. So I started out by just emailing my board of supervisor representative. And then she connected me to Chris, who's the library director. And now here I am.

A: Well, I have never been to the LA Public Library, but I bet you have.

C: Yes.

A: What's it like?

So the LA Central Library in downtown, which kind of gets the flagship library is, I mean, even if you're just an architecture person, the building itself is unbelievable. You know, when I first started dating my partner, I kind of gave her like an LA tour weekend. And one of the first places I took her was the library. And it was actually like, even when the library is closed, technically the way it's set up is you can still go in and walk around a fair amount of it. And so, yeah, I mean, it's amazing. There's this one section where there's like a series of staircases and you can see all the different floors and areas and departments of the library. I think somewhat recent development there, it's probably one of the most amazing things they have is the Octavia Butler Lab, they call it.

A: Tell us about that.

C: It just has, for people who maybe haven't been to a library recently, like you want to see what's going on in public libraries, go to the Octavia Butler Lab. It has, you know, we're doing a podcast right now. It has sound booths and everything you need if you want to go and record your own podcast. It has...

A: Oh, she would love that.

C: Yeah, absolutely. It has 3D printers. It has, you know, screen printing stuff. It just like everything you could imagine...

A: For creativity.

C: For creativity. It has it there, as well as trained, experienced staff who can teach you how to use it. Like you can walk in there like, I want to start doing a podcast and never had done anything close to it. And like, they'll help you figure it out.

A: That's awesome.

C: And it's all free.

A: Right? Public library.

C: Public library. Everything is free.

A: The people's champion.

C: Yes.

A: Awesome. That's great. Well, I have, I know everyone was encouraging folks to read *Parable of the Sower* right around the... because it's 2024 was I think the year that she said her book and very famous book.

C: Yeah, yeah.

A: Awesome. That's so great. Here's another question for you. What is the book or author that got you excited about reading? Were you a big reader?

C: How far back do I want to go?

A: You sound like you were a big reader based on your quote, unquote, librarian in Connecticut whose house you went to.

C: So I'll share the like cute little kid one first. I read and reread *Mighty Mouse* like probably several hundred times. That was yeah, that's just a cute little kid story. I had I honestly don't remember what version of it was. But I had a version of *Knights of the Roundtable* that I read a lot. And I think I've always loved that kind of historical stuff. And I credit reading that to instilling that in me. You know, we were talking about, you know, the *Revolutions* podcast. I love all that historical stuff. I think it's important for people to have a decent understanding of history. I think more recently, though, I think what's had a huge impact on me and I got introduced in college and kind of took me on my political journey was Steinbeck. I've read all of Steinbeck's stuff. I think just the way he's able to portray those stories and the chunk of history that he covered is amazing. And I think it also the understanding or the understanding that people think they have of that period of American history and the Dust Bowl and the development of the West. And he puts a much different truth to it, if you will. And I think it's something that, you know, everything going on right now with people's views on immigration and the labor workforce, they need to read some Steinbeck.

A: They definitely need to read some Steinbeck because there is nobody there's definitely not another white man, white male author I can think of, who wrote with more compassion about the Latinos who were working the fields up in the Long Valley. And have you read the story "Breakfast"?

C: No.

A: It's from his collection called *The Long Valley*.

C: Okay.

A: That's a really good one. But Steinbeck is, he's got, we could all learn more compassion from Steinbeck.

C: Yeah.

A: Awesome. Jay, thank you so much for coming over and speaking with us about joining the Library Foundation Board and wanting to put your shoulder a little bit stronger against the wheel, if you will, to try to help save the library system and keep it strong.

C: I think I would encourage everybody in whatever way, you know, whatever interests you in life, there's a way to tie that to public libraries. And with the stress that our democracy is under right now, you know, our unique form of democracy is intricately tied into our public library history and system in this country. And you can't preserve and defend one without preserving and defending the other.

A: Yes. Yes, I agree with you. And if you listen to episode three, I believe, that's where you can hear Lloyd Tanner of the Festival Mosaic says very much the same thing about the democratic project of the public library system and how important it is.

C: It's a great equalizer for sure.

A: I'm all, I'm so happy to be on the same team with all of you.

C: Well, thank you for inviting me. This is my first podcast that I've been a part of.

A: Wow. That's awesome. Thank you very much.

C: Thank you. Thank you.

A: Our final segment on this very last day of 2025 comes to you by way of our SLO County Library Foundation board president, Julianne McAdam. She'll tell us about one of the unique projects pursued by the library foundation, purchasing and installing a proper headstone for the very first librarian of the SLO library. We are here again with Julianne McAdam, president of the San Luis Obispo County Library Foundation board. How are you Julianne?

D: I'm fine. Thank you, Rachel. How are you?

A: I'm doing good. Always nice to see you.

D: Great to see you.

A: And we are wanting to hear more about this special project that was done with the SLO library and the library foundation for the very first librarian of the SLO library. And tell us about this project, which you were very involved in.

D: Well, I was actually fairly new to the board, so this was a new project for me. But the adult services librarian at the library had somehow found out about this librarian, Frances Milne, who was the first librarian for San Luis Obispo back in the day when the library was a Carnegie library. And we all know where that building is now. It's now the History Center. And this woman, Margaret Milne, was buried. The librarian found out that she's buried at the San Luis Cemetery beside her husband and her mother. And her husband and her mother both have headstones, but she does not. This is probably because they pre-deceased her and she took care of their headstones, but there was no one left to get one for her. So the librarian decided that she really should have a headstone and she engaged the library foundation to help with that. So the foundation mounted a GoFundMe campaign, because that kind of funding isn't part of our mission. We fund collection development, but we wanted to help with this. So we started a GoFundMe campaign and the response was really wonderful. We raised about \$5,000, which was enough to get a really nice engraved headstone. And then on the morning of April 27th, this was 2019, we had a ceremony. Very cold, cloudy morning, but it was wonderful because there were a lot of people there, library people, foundation people. There were news organizations represented. A local minister had been engaged to come and say some words and he was wonderful. There were Francis Milne's relatives, were there a cousin and some other relatives of hers who came. And we found out that she was also a poet. Francis Milne was a poet and one of her

relatives read a poem that she wrote just before her death. And the librarian who had discovered her read another of her poems. And then the last line of one of those poems is actually inscribed on her headstone. And that line is, love shall prove her triumph true.

A: Nice.

D: And at the ceremony we had a huge spray of flowers on her headstone and we felt really good because she finally got the recognition that she deserved.

A: What a wonderful project.

D: It was so heartwarming and so wonderful. Yes, it was great.

A: Yes, nobody needed to do that and she would not have noticed because she has passed away.

D: Exactly.

A: But to acknowledge, as I said in the last episode, I have met so many wonderful librarians who absolutely love their jobs while doing this podcast. And so it's super nice that the Library Foundation and the Library Friends worked together to honor this important person in San Luis Obispo's intellectual past.

D: Absolutely, yes.

A: Cool, thank you Julianne.

D: Oh, thank you Rachel for asking about it.

A: We hope you're learning more about your public library and enjoying our We Love the Library podcast. Next time we'll learn more about graphic novels in general from Adult Services Coordinating Librarian Monique Mata. Then we'll speak with staff at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles about George Takei's graphic novel style memoir, *They Called Us Enemy*. Mr. Takei's book takes us into an internment camp where he and his family were incarcerated by the United States government after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We'll also learn more about the SLO Makerspace and its collaboration with the SLO County Library System. At certain hours of the week, your SLO County Library card provides a degree of access to the SLO Makerspace. It's like the library of much larger things where your library card allows you to use big, less portable tools. If you want to participate in our pro-library podcast, send us an email podcast at slolibraryfoundation.org. If you want to learn more about the SLO County Library Foundation, if you want to buy some merch, or if you want to make a donation, visit our website at slolibraryfoundation.org. The next episode drops in two weeks. Thank you for listening and for helping support the public library, the people's champion.