SPOTLIGHT on Public Libraries: Burnsville Public Library

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SPOTLIGHT on Public Libraries

This new column will highlight academic, public, and special libraries across the Southeast as well as interesting collections and outstanding library professionals.

Burnsville Public Library
Burnsville, WV

by The SELA Public Library Section

Upon first glance, Burnsville Public Library may seem like a typical small town, rural library, but once you step inside, you can see that it is anything but typical. The library is usually a hub of activity, but the COVID-19 pandemic has rendered this activity non-existent. With a staff that is equivalent to about 1.03 full-time employees, this small library has been providing innovative and much needed programs and services to their town of around 500 people and the surrounding areas for a total service population of 3,723.

Burnsville Public Library director Beth Anderson began her tenure nearly six years ago in July 2015. Anderson has been the driving factor in the vast array of programming and services expansion seen from BPL. “When I started we offered very limited programming options. I have three children, at the time one was a teenager and two were early elementary-aged, so I thought starting with youth programs would be in line with community needs. I wanted to start offering new and expanded programming so children and families would have options of things to do,” says Anderson.

In an effort to realize this vision, BPL created a program for elementary-aged children. This program started as a Saturday program, Reading with Miss D. There were two core participants, Anderson’s youngest children. Her sons were really the catalyst for the additional participation. They had so much fun at the program they told their friends and invited them to come, and word began to spread. The program went through some changes. Reading with Miss D became Reading with Mr. P and then Hands on Reading, but the program remained strong and continued to gain momentum. This program became the library’s after school program when it moved from Saturdays to Thursdays in January 2017. In September 2017, it was expanded to a four-day a week after school program. This program, under non-pandemic circumstances, sees between 150 – 200 children every week.

Keeping existing programs in mind, Anderson expanded programs such as BPL’s Toddler Story Hour to occur weekly rather than the usual once per month. Offering the program more often increases the likelihood that they will have attendees and shows the community the library is working for them. The most successful program expansion came with Summer Reading. In 2016, the library expanded their Summer Reading Program from 3 days to 9 days, occurring one day per week during Summer. This expansion was a big success, but it was not the only expansion the program would see. In 2018, BPL expanded again to bring more of a Summer Camp feel to the program. Activities ran Monday-Friday from 10:30

Librarian Beth Anderson and children during an activity
am to 4:30 pm for 9 weeks. Each day of the week had a different theme or topic. It was very well re-
ceived. Some attendees were dropped off, while others attended with their parents. There was a lot of
growth that summer. The library was going to revamp the program again for 2020, but COVID-19 hit
and all in-person programming went on hiatus. “As we begin thinking about the 2021 Summer Reading
Program I am going to hope for in-person programs, but know they may or may not happen,” says An-
derson.

In 2017, the library was fortunate to be in-
cluded in the inaugural group for PLA’s iii program. The Inclusive Intern Initiative or iii was created by
PLA to encourage diversity in libraries through a paid internship program for high school juniors and
seniors. The library had two phenomenal interns that year. They helped the library hold Super Why and
Odd Squad Camps, created a teen program called the Teen Scene, created a summer long science series
that culminated in watching the solar eclipse, and developed a Family Game Night. They also helped
with a fundraiser BINGO which raised enough mon-
ey for them to bring the DOME Theater to town. The
library was also a part of the 2019 iii program.

The accomplishment that means the most to Anderson, BPL, and the community is being a part
of the second cohort of OCLC’s Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces. This program is provided by OCLC
and their partner ARSL. This program teaches small libraries about how to get their community’s in-
volved in planning and implementing a space where members of the community can come to learn, or
share in activities. The library went through approximately 2 years of online learning, virtual meetings,
and support from the grant staff and other libraries in the cohort. Speaking about the community en-
gagement process, Anderson explains, “We utilized volunteers to help get our wish tree filled with ideas
of what people wanted in our community. Then we used a bot board to get ideas for what new and inno-
vative things they wanted in the library. In the end, we were able to purchase items that reflect what our
community wants, as well as creates a Smart Space in our library.” Some of the items they purchased
include: Cricut and Heat Press with extra vinyl, a coffee bar, hot plates and necessary equipment to host
a cooking program, an indoor/outdoor projector, music production equipment, a 65” TV and surround
sound system, a green screen, a DSLR camera and video camera, and various other items that will make

People gathered at the BPL to watch the solar eclipse of 2017

The Super Why and Odd Squad event

The library started Family Movie Nights in 2017. Those have morphed into Family STEAM
Movie Nights that are held at least once a month. Families gather for a STEAM activity or two and
then watch a movie. The library provides popcorn and drinks. Anderson is thrilled to have devel-
oped this program with such great community success. “We have three or four core families that rarely miss a program, and several additional families who attend occasionally.” As soon as the
winter weather breaks, and it is warm enough in the evenings, BPL will start Family STEAM Movie
Night: Parking Lot Edition. There will be activi-
ties set up outside and then the movie will be
shown outside. Families will have their own area
in the parking lot. This will allow for social dis-
tancing and fresh air. In addition to the family movies, the library plans on doing Parking Lot Movies:
Retro Films. This will include a brief educational program and a retro/classic movie.

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the library space more user-friendly. Patrons will be able to use any of these items for free, but BPL asks for a donation of any amount from those who can so the library staff can replenish their supplies.

The local extension agency is going to help BPL with a cooking video series. The library has already started their monthly Children’s Cooking series (you can check it out on the library’s Facebook page or their new YouTube Channel, just visit their website for more details: http://burnsville.lib.wv.us/, and they will be starting an Adult Cooking series very soon. A local podcaster has offered to be a mentor if anyone would like to start a podcast. The library also plans on doing photography and videography classes, as well as a paranormal walk around town for Halloween. The library hopes that with all the new technology and programs, they will be able to reach the middle and high school patrons that they have struggled to reach in the past.

One of the library’s newest endeavors is facilitating a series of community conversations about our town and community. According to Anderson the BPL wants to know strengths, identify weaknesses, and create a plan on how to improve where needed. This is part of the LTC: Focus on Small and Rural libraries grant from ALA and ARSL. This grant provides professional development on how to plan and facilitate community conversations and how to deal with issues that may arise during the conversation. “We look forward to being able to facilitate these conversations and ask the hard questions,” says Anderson.

If you would like any additional information on any of the programs, services, or opportunities available at the Burnsville Public Library, just reach out to them. You can find BPL on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and now YouTube. You can also check out their website, http://burnsville.lib.wv.us/ or contact them by phone at 304-853-2338.

The SELA Public Library Section wants to thank the Burnsville Public Library for being the first “SPOTLIGHT on Public Libraries.” If you would like to have your public library featured please email the leadership of SELA’s Public Library Section: Beth Anderson, Chair, at beth.anderson@clark.lib.wv.us or Danielle Thornton, Chair-Elect, at dthornton@greenvillelibrary.org.

Please send SPOTLIGHT inquiries or suggestions for academic and special libraries, collections, or library professionals to the Editor, Ashley S. Dees, at aesorey@olemiss.edu.