

Check It Out!

NOT YOUR GRANDPARENTS' LIBRARY

*Uplifting our community
through reading, learning, connection,
and creativity*

Mission of the Port Townsend Public Library

by Lynn Nowak

STANDING THE TEST OF TIME—125 years since its founding in 1898 and 110 years as a Carnegie library—the Port Townsend Public Library remains a vibrant community resource and an epicenter for learning, but today’s incarnation is so much more. This is not your grandparents’ library.

Library director Melody Sky Weaver says she often thinks about Andrew Carnegie’s vision of libraries as palaces for the people, where all can become kings and queens when they enter what Carnegie called libraries’ “exalted halls of knowledge.” In fact, the grand staircase so characteristic of Carnegie libraries symbolizes the notion that everyone can ascend to what he believed was the sacred space within.

Carnegie’s vision still holds true in 2023, but beyond a space for private study, libraries are now thriving centers for the community, Weaver said. “Reading has always been the foundation, but the library is also a center for lifelong learning,



“A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert.”

—Andrew Carnegie

building connections, and exploring hopes, dreams, and creativity. . . . We bring people together from all walks of life.” Libraries are central to the social infrastructure of a community and a cornerstone of democracy.

Keith Darrock, library manager of public and technical services, said, “Many people still use the library to sit and read the newspaper or a magazine in a beautiful, quiet space.” But also, people want and need a connection to others, which is why various programs such as Community Read, Summer Reading, author talks, and storytimes are popular and well attended. And today, access to information has exploded. Thanks to digital tools, the library is available 24/7, Weaver said. Plus, the resources available through library channels have grown in sometimes unexpected ways.

For example, book clubs can check out book kits for their members. Cooks can dabble in cuisines of other cultures by

picking up specific spice collections. And library patrons can borrow unusual items ranging from a pickleball set to camping gear, a sewing machine, craft kits, toys, a moisture meter, snowshoes, cake pans, stud finder, tool kit, and even a ukulele. "This summer I did a backpacking and surfing trip deep into Olympic National Park. I checked out the library's bear can, cook stove, tent, and sleeping pad," Darrock noted. "What a cool way to use the library!"

Digital explosion

The proliferation of digital resources includes the Washington Anytime Library, which Weaver said now offers more than one million items, including audiobooks, e-books, and digital magazines. Port Townsend Public Library users can access them by locating the e-resources link on ptpubliclibrary.org.

Darrock said e-books and e-audiobooks are still new to some, but they make up a large percentage of the library's total circulation. "We now circulate close to as many digital books as physical books each month," he said. Conversely, physical DVDs are still very popular. "We are among the last video stores standing!"

Dozens of databases also are available to the community, including newspaper archives and wide-ranging topics from genealogy to children's literature, craft classes, legal and business information, maritime resources, language assistance, and health and wellness guides. Often, the only requirement to access these is a library card number. If people have questions, librarians are available to assist with any database.

"One notable difference in the library of today is the absence of a reference collection," Darrock said. In the past, a reference librarian would have been trained to find obscure answers. "Now, those databases help patrons find specific information, but in many ways that process has shifted to people doing their own research." That's not to say that librarians don't provide their expertise anymore, because they do, but the requests tend to be less frequent, Darrock

1898

LIBRARY RULE NO. 6

*A regularly registered
borrower may take out
two books at one time,
but only one of these
may be fiction.*

explained. Weaver cited a famous quote by author Neil Gaiman, which librarians love: "Google can bring you back 100,000 answers, but a librarian can bring you back the right one."

Geralynn Rackowski, a longtime Friends supporter and past president, said one huge leap between yesteryear's library and today's is the automation of the card catalog. "It went from one paper card file per library; to library computers; then to every computer, tablet, and phone having access." "When I was a kid and a teenager," she said, "I went to the library every week." She would ask the librarian for recommendations and browsed through the stacks, special displays, and new-books shelf. Her habits have evolved, though.

Today, Rackowski still browses the stacks and special displays, occasionally picks out physical books, and values the librarians' opinions, but most often she checks out books and e-books online. Similarly, Owen Rowe, another Friend, echoed that the most apparent difference between the past and present library is the

technological shifts. "We used to have the Reader's Guide and microfiche; now we have e-books and streaming movies."

According to Linnea Patrick, library director from 1995 to 2003, one of the factors in her accepting the job in Port Townsend was that the library had already automated, thanks to the efforts of former directors Beverly Shelton and Cheryl Silverblatt. They had participated with the Jefferson County Library to install automated library catalog and checkout systems, Patrick said. The main reader's service developed since she retired is providing access to e-books and classes for library users on how to use new technologies, she added.

"I grew up being an avid reader. My first libraries were the one in my grade school and the Spokane County Library Bookmobile that served the Spokane Valley," Patrick said. Like other patrons, her library habits have also changed over the years. A reader of history and biography, but especially fiction, she finds that she reads on her Kindle more than ever now. She doesn't check out books as often as she did earlier in life. "That's partly due to trying to get all the books on my own shelves read!" Still, she said, one of her greatest joys as a librarian was being first to see all the newly purchased books.

Patrick was proud to continue the work begun by former librarians to provide programs for children and adults, offer the library as a community gathering place, and build an excellent book collection that reflected the interests of all local residents, young and old. Her successor, Theresa Percy, reinforced this legacy.

Thanks to a voter-approved increase in tax revenue for the library in 2008, expansion and renovation of the library campus could begin under Percy's tenure. With the help of various grants, the library was able to offer the community more programs and services: outreach efforts such as Books on Wheels and Books for Babies; programs including an annual Community Read and Summer Reading; more public computers and internet access; and numerous partnerships with local entities, including the Maritime

2023

*Borrowers may take out
—or place on hold—
as many items
as they wish,
even if they are
all fiction.*

Center and Port Townsend schools.

Emily Bufford, current library manager for youth and outreach services, invoked the 2022 picture book *A Library*, by Nikki Giovanni, as illustrative of how libraries have changed and how they remain the same. The description of the author's childhood experience at a Carnegie library in Tennessee "might sound familiar to many of us who grew up visiting the Port Townsend library," Bufford said.

My first memory of my library is a big room with heavy wooden tables, heavy oak chairs, and creaky wood floors. Banker's lamps with green shades ran down the center of the tables. In the foyer, there was a semicircular desk; to the left, a card catalog; and to the right, newspapers draped over wooden dowels. There was always the welcoming smile of my librarian and the joy of so many books waiting for me. (Giovanni, copyright page)

Bufford noted, "We no longer have card catalogs, but as a children's librarian, my hope is that children and families will always find a librarian who greets them with warmth and a smile."

Access for all

Weaver emphasizes that the library not only is a place for learning and creation, but also affords a safe, free environment. "It's so critical that we have places in this world that are trusted spaces." Not everyone has modern digital devices at their fingertips, for example. "Libraries are democratic centers for access to knowledge."

Rackowski is pleased that over time, recognition of non-English-speaking people and people of any race, gender, or sexual orientation has become an increasing priority here. That is reflected in a heightened commitment by librarians and staff to offer inclusive collections that meet the needs of the whole community.

Referring again to *A Library*, Bufford said that the author expressed her gratitude to her own childhood librarian, who used to travel to a main library in her community and bring stacks of books back for the author, who would not have

1898

LIBRARY RULE NO. 15

No borrower shall be permitted to take a book from the library until he shall have paid all the sums due to the library, or made good all damages or losses which he may have occasioned.

been able to access them at her segregated branch. "What a powerful testimony to the role of librarians, and a sobering reminder of how far we have come over the past eighty years," Bufford said. "I hope that when children walk in our doors, they feel safe to be themselves, and that we are providing them with the resources to grow to be the amazing individuals they were always meant to be."

Libraries are still very much on the forefront of ensuring that all voices are heard, Weaver said. "Every voice matters." And libraries are ground zero for ensuring they are heard. In September 2023, the American Library Association (ALA) cited a 20 percent rise in attempts to censor books and materials in public, school, and academic libraries in the first eight months of this year compared with the same reporting period in 2022. And last year saw the most book challenges—1,269 to be exact—since the ALA began compiling these data more than twenty years ago. Most of the challenges were to books

2023

Borrowers who have over \$25 in fees for lost or damaged materials must still pay before taking out anything more.

written by or about a person of color or a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, according to the ALA. Newly elected ALA president Emily Drabinski has observed that it's not simply a challenge aimed at a few books and materials but one aimed at the lives and experiences of the people they represent; "not those books [means] not those people."

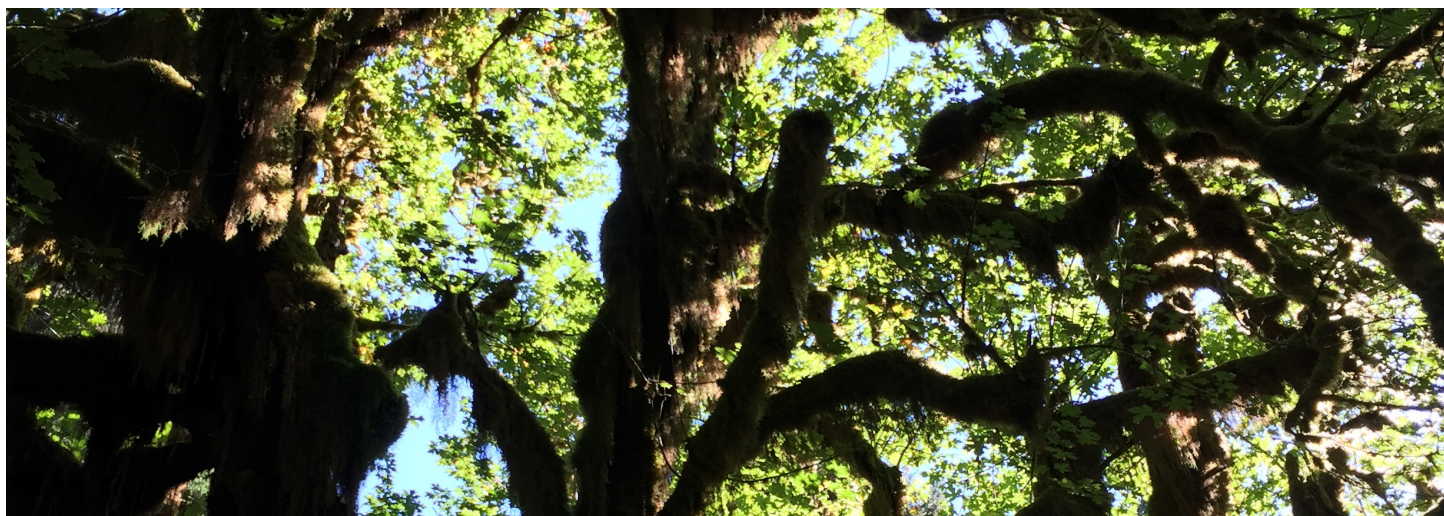
Weaver said librarians might not necessarily defend the content of all books and materials but emphatically added, "We will always defend people's right to access it." She said in this age of instantaneous news, the flood of words can be seductive and make consumers susceptible to erroneous messaging. "Librarians can help you navigate this sea of information."

Future insight

Weaver believes that future libraries might serve their communities in surprisingly new and innovative ways, while remaining trusted gathering places, free from judgment. As the climate changes, a library building could serve as a heating or cooling center or an oasis of filtered air. She thinks that our Carnegie library and the Library Learning Center are well taken care of and can weather the future as they have weathered the past. They might be the safe physical spaces that people will need, while also supplying a wealth of things to do and learn.

"Libraries and librarians are highly adaptable," Weaver said. She believes they will be ready to take on new roles. "It's exciting to be a public librarian because we're ever evolving. We come to it because it's a deep calling to serve." Said Darrock, "Libraries will always keep reinventing themselves in little ways to stay relevant, but I think the most important thing we can do is have great collections, programs, physical spaces, and staff who can help people."

"We will always have books and be stewards for stories," Weaver said. The format might change—from scrolls in the Library of Alexandria, to books, to digital resources, to whatever lies ahead. "But what's more universal than stories?" 



ELLEN CHU

The Last Old-Growth Tree

a short story

by Hilina Taylor-Lenz

RUVSÁ GAZED UP at the great tree, tears slipping from her green eyes. Her breath caught in her throat, and she clutched her abdomen, fingers wet with blood. She was dying. The tree's branches stretched out above her, as if giving her a warm embrace. Jagged sobs escaped her rib cage, making her cry out. The more she cried, the more her bullet wound hurt.

Curled up at the base of the tree, she felt helpless, afraid, and angry—angry at Earth R., the logging company that had shot her to get the valuable wood of the last old-growth tree. Nobody would know what had happened to her; her murderers would walk free. Suddenly, she had an idea. Drawing a sharp, painful breath as she gingerly sat up, Ruvsá reached into her back pocket and took out a small notebook and pencil. She would leave the people who discovered her body a note. She would tell her story. Taking strength from her tree's beautiful branches, she touched pencil to paper and began scribbling.

My name is Ruvsá Sola, and this book contains my story. It holds the evidence to incriminate my murderers. So please read this book, and turn it over to authorities.

I started my journey to save this tree the moment I drew my first breath. I am Sami, from a group of indigenous people in Scandinavia. We fight for our Earth, for the creatures, plants, and spaces we share our time on Earth with. In the Sami culture, all things have spirits from your family: all humans, all mammals, all animals, all plants. From the grand boulders and waterfalls down to the small pebbles in a stream. All things that came from the Earth have a spirit.

This is the way I was brought up. I was taught that I have my mother, but I also have the Earth, and she is as much my mother as my actual mother. She gives me life, peace, and safety. All of nature is my family. The sun takes care of me, providing me with light and energy. The plants and animals are my siblings; they give me oxygen and food. You see, we all need to work together to survive. We must depend on each other, and if we can't . . . well, then we die. We must all work together to save this beautiful organism we call home. We must not fight tooth and claw for our own greed; we need to link paw to hand, hand to claw, claw to root to save the Earth, to save ourselves.

I remember being so shocked and angry when I discovered that people are killing and then stuffing endangered species, just because they are valuable. Someone important to me once said, "Be fueled by the things that make you mad, that disgust you. Take all the things that make you want to give up on humanity, and turn that into your drive. Because if it sickens you to hear about something, then you should probably try to fix it. So when I saw the headline COMPANY EARTH R. PAYS THE GOVERNMENT \$985.2 BILLION DOLLARS FOR PERMIT TO CUT DOWN LAST OLD-GROWTH TREE, I immediately knew I had to do something.

Ruvsá looked up from her notebook. She knew she needed to keep writing, but the pain was making her dizzy. She thought about how wrong it was that a company could buy off the government, that if you had enough money, the government basically became like stock—that if you buy some of it, you own some of it. The more you buy, the more you own, and the more you can make. She despised it. Ruvsá shook her head and

chastised herself for getting distracted. She parted her lips, returned her pencil to the paper, and continued scribbling.

Earth R. was getting tired of people protesting the cutting down of the old-growth tree, so they ordered the protestors out of the forest, claiming that they were trespassing. About half the people dispersed. But when the remaining peaceful protesters refused to go, Earth R. decided to use tear gas. It was horrific. The only warning we got was a brisk shout to get back, and then the tear gas canisters were flying through the air. When they gassed us, I was on the edge of the crowd, so I was mostly unaffected, but I remember the screaming and fear. People trampled each other trying to get away. Instead of going down the road, I climbed a nearby hill and hid.

Ruvsá took a deep breath and looked up. The sky had taken on the colors of dusk. At that moment, she knew this was her time. She was supposed to die here: Ruvsá Sola would die at the base of her tree, the tree she saved. She would make a difference. Her pursuit was to save, her tree was her purpose, and once she finished her story, she would have completed that purpose. Ruvsá looked back at the sky; the soft pink from earlier had faded into a rusty orange, which bled into a bright blood red lighting up the clouds like fire. She smiled at the sky once more before touching pencil back to paper.

After that I stayed nearby and tried my best to slow down Earth R. Soon they brought in tanks to finish the cut, and I knew I needed to finish this. All they needed to do was chop down the last couple feet of forest for the tanks so they could reach my tree. I grabbed my bolt cutters and crowbar, sneaked into Earth R.'s camp and went to work on the machines. I first cut the wires to the tanks, then tried to damage the fuel tanks with my crowbar, but I must have made too much noise and woke some of the guards. Before I could react, a beefy arm wrapped around my torso, forcing me to drop my crowbar while his other hand covered my mouth.

"Why is a pretty little girl like you all the way out here by yourself?" taunted the guard.

His wretched-smelling breath was warm against my neck. His friend chuckled. I bit his hand as hard as I could. With a howl, he let go of me and cradled his hand. I spit blood from my mouth as I dropped to the ground and grabbed my crowbar. I swung it and hit the brute in both knees with all my might. Then I brought it down on his shin, and his leg made a sickening crack. The other guard lunged at me, but I swung my crowbar and hit him in the solar plexus. The wind knocked out of him, he dropped to the ground. As soon as both guards crumpled, I ran back to the tank's fuel tank. A few minutes of slamming my crowbar into the fuel tank, and it burst. Pitch-black oil poured onto the ground turning the bright green grass oily black.

As I turned to go, I heard the click of a gun being loaded. I turned around slowly, to be faced with the head of the operation himself, Mr. Cartwright (and his twenty-nine guards). Mr. Cartwright looked a little too put together for living in the wilderness for a month. His salt-and-pepper hair was clean and slicked back with a little too much hair gel. His suit was too crisp. Mr. Cartwright is responsible for the extinction of fifteen species. Mr. Cartwright is an evil man.

"We will be detaining you, so please come willingly," commanded Mr. Cartwright.

As the guards started to argue about what to do with me, I noticed a puddle of oil near me that led to the tank. Slowly, to not draw attention to myself, I slipped a lighter from my pocket, lit it, then tossed it into the fuel. All the guards turned toward the fire in concern, allowing me to slip from their circle. As soon as I was free, I sprinted toward my tree. As I ran, I heard one explosion from behind me, then a second. Soon after, I heard feet pounding behind me. I stumbled into a small clearing. At the edge of the clearing was the cliff where my tree stood. I skidded to a halt on reaching my tree. I was cornered. Mr. Cartwright and five of his guards entered the clearing, spreading out to keep me pinned against the cliff, guns pointed at my chest.

"I was only going to detain you until the police came," said Mr. Cartwright. "But you have made a grave mistake. You not only caused a big delay in our plans, you also cost me millions of dollars." He spat at the ground between us.

I shouted, "Don't you know all your money is worthless? You will leave this world the same as anyone else no matter how much money you have clutched in your fists as you choke on your own spit and die. Your money is worthless. You have done unfathomably revolting things, and for what? Numbers on a computer? Green paper? Silver coin?" I saw that his face was red with anger. His gelled hair was out of place, his white suit gray with ash. He glared at me with eyes full of spite, then lifted his gun and fired. The world went silent except for a loud crack then the ring in my ears.

Ruvsá finished her story. She put down her notebook and let her head fall back against her tree. She watched her breath turn into a plume of water vapor in the cold night air. She gazed up at the stars. The night was beautiful, and Ruvsá was glad that the sky was cloud-free; it was by far the best night to be her last night. She could see the stars so perfectly, so clearly. She could see the faint purple and blues from the Milky Way. She thought it was so lovely the way her tree's branches blocked out the starry light and made such a beautiful shadow. In that moment, Ruvsá knew she had found peace, true peace.

As she gazed up at the sky, the stars reflected in her glossy eyes, she realized she was tired of fighting. She knew deep down that she should not succumb to the cold, that if she fell asleep, she would never wake up. That was okay, because Ruvsá had completed her purpose; she was done, and now it was her time to move on.

"Good bye, and just know I love you with all my heart," she rasped to her tree. Then with a small smile playing on her lips, Ruvsá drifted off to sleep. 

Hilina Taylor-Lenz is a sophomore at Port Townsend High School. The Friends encourages young people to read and to write for this newsletter.

Friends' President Goes to Chicago

This past June, Friends' president Deb Vanderbilt (*below*) took time out of her vacation in Chicago to attend opening day of the American Library Association's (ALA) Annual Conference and Exhibition. Vanderbilt raved about the conference's overwhelmingly positive atmosphere, saying, "There were thousands of people there, all walking around with grins on their faces." She'd been to many conferences over her career, she continued, but never had she experienced such a welcoming and inclusive community.

Keynote speakers launching the conference included Illinois secretary of state and state librarian Alexi Giannoulis.* Giannoulis, a lifelong supporter of literacy and libraries, was clearly proud to share with conference goers that Illinois governor J. B. Pritzker had just signed into law a first-of-its-kind-in-the-nation ban on book banning in Illinois public libraries. Said Vanderbilt, the "crowd went wild" with the news, and the mood was optimistic that more states would follow suit. She remarked that many of the speeches addressed concerns over book banning, as well as LGBTQ+ rights. Throughout the speeches, the crowd was "standing and cheering constantly."

Another featured guest was author Judy Blume, who was interviewed by Simon & Shuster's senior vice president and publisher Justin Chanda. Vanderbilt was impressed by Blume, whose books have addressed controversial topics for decades and have frequently been the target of those who would ban what they see as sensitive subject matter.

After the keynote speakers, Vanderbilt made strategic use of her time to canvas the vast hall of exhibits. She noted that much attention was directed at youth enrichment, and she searched specifically for high-impact ideas to bolster the Friends' funding effectiveness supporting the Port Townsend library's own youth enrichment efforts. Two concepts that particularly struck her were:

1. Purchasing tickets to local educational experiences for the library to distribute to young readers.
2. Expanding the acquisition of creative assembly kits, which children can construct at the library and then take home.

Ideas like these would boost the Friends' currently sponsored projects—nearly 2,000 adult and children's programs in the past decade; three big book sales a year, plus pop-ups at the uptown farmers markets and a new Bookshop in the Library Learning Center; an annual Community Read; a Summer Reading Program for all ages; book club kits that local book clubs may check out; and circulation of useful items, such as a sewing machine, stud finder, cake pans, camping and fishing gear, and more.

In all, over 550 exhibitors and close to 16,000 librarians and library supporters attended the ALA conference, and, said Vanderbilt, these literacy-supporting adults came together to create an atmosphere of

confidence, enthusiasm, and commitment. It was Vanderbilt's view that conference attendees stood strongly against book banning and censorship and are unwavering supporters of open and free access to the world's thoughts, ideas, and knowledge. (*See also our story in the fall 2022 issue of this newsletter.*)

In a recent interview on *The Ezra Klein Show*, newly elected ALA president Emily Drabinski framed the present censorship wave this way: public libraries, like the US Postal Service, are "sharing institutions." They hold resources and services in common for everyone, and their job is to distribute these resources and services equitably. Challenges against certain library books and materials don't just threaten a few items in one place or another; they threaten the sharing institutions' very ability to provide their local communities what they need and rely on—whether books, internet access, or tool kits. Recent would-be censors have threatened school libraries in particular, aiming to deprive children of information and ideas, of a safe place where they can read freely during lunch hour.

In Drabinski's view, public libraries' ability to provide access to "literally everyone" is the key to their durability. She believes—as does the Friends—that we should be talking about how to strengthen this institution, "the best public institution in the history of the world—the library." —Margaret Peterson

* The Illinois secretary of state serves as the state librarian.



Thanks & Welcome, New Friends!

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Newsletters are available online, at the library and Food Co-op, and elsewhere

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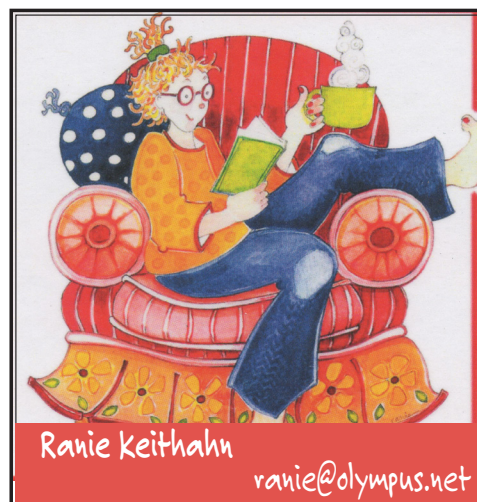
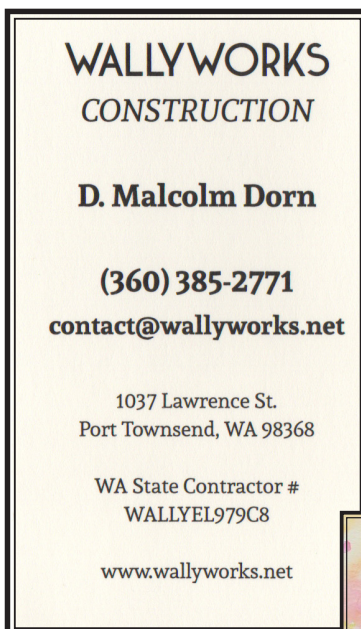
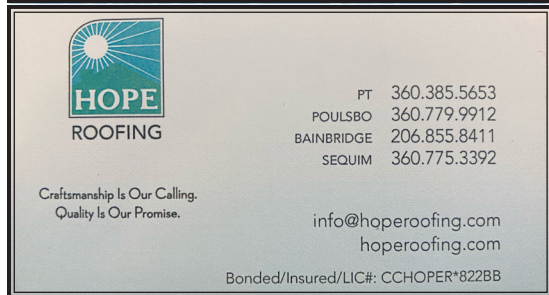
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Dates to remember

- October 1-7 Banned Books Week
- October 13, 3-5 PM Drop-in birthday party for the Carnegie library's 110th
- October 17, 7 PM History of the library with Melody Sky Weaver
- October 21, 10-3 Friends' book sale Uptown Community Center
- November 17, 7 PM Unusual items to check out with Keith Darrock



Who We Are

THE PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY was founded in 1898 by volunteers and, thanks to continuing community support, has remained an active Carnegie library since its present doors opened in 1913.

The Friends of the Port Townsend Library, established in 1978, supports programs, services, and materials beyond what the city's library budget covers. Every year we fund reading programs, events, and activities for all ages; we also hold book sales and publish three newsletters. Newsletters are available in the library, around town, and at friendsofptlibrary.org.

Our funding comes primarily from supporters, donations, and book sales. We invite anyone to become a Friend and attend our board meetings, which take place on the second Wednesday of each month, usually at 3:30 PM, at the Library Learning Center (corner of Lawrence and Harrison). Please contact us by email at friendsofptlibrary@gmail.com for updates.

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