

Press release- **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 23, 2025

CONTACT:

Eric Petersen, Chair, Missouri Library Association Awards Committee

ericpetersen@kclibrary.org

Missouri Library of the Year, 14 other awards presented to outstanding libraries

Chesterfield, MO- The Missouri Library Association's (MLA's) top award, 2025 Missouri Library of the Year, was presented to **West Plains Public Library** on October 9 at the MLA conference in Chesterfield, a suburb of St. Louis. This award is given for distinguished achievement in library service and accompanied 14 other awards and scholarships presented to libraries, library employees, community organizations and authors. With eight staff members, West Plains has experienced huge growth in general usage (55,000 visitors last year, not including special events) and program participation while forming valuable community partnerships and securing grant funding. In 2024, program attendance increased by almost 60 percent over 2023, and the Library worked with the Missouri Humanities Council (among other groups) on cultural programming. West Plains also won a grant to fund improvements in security, literacy initiatives, technology infrastructure and public spaces.

The recipients of the Outstanding Community Partnership Award were **Scenic Regional Library, in partnership with Prevent+Ed and HOPE for Franklin County Coalition**. The Coalition has provided Scenic Regional with funding to purchase more than 1,200 locking medicine boxes, hundreds of Detera bags and other wellness supplies for library patrons. The Library has hosted Prevent+Ed's Certified Peer Specialist trailer at several branches, affording patrons the opportunity to get immediate assistance. Several Scenic Regional library staff have served on the HOPE Coalition. With this partnership, the Library's St. Clair Branch acquired a naloxone vending machine for free naloxone distribution. A second machine was installed at another branch in 2025. The Library has disbursed more than 1,000 doses of life-saving naloxone from this collaboration.

The Excellence in Genealogy and Local History Award winner was the **St. Louis County Library History & Genealogy Department**. In March 2024, the department launched the St. Louis County Library Digital Archive. The launch was the result of years of preparation by the entire department, and for the first time granted the community free digital access to the department's holdings of historic city and county directories, burial certificates, and yearbooks. The original collection included 1,706 items. Since the 2024 launch, the collection now includes more than 4,900 items, including newspapers, photos and atlases. The public response has been tremendous, including patron requests to add their own items (such as yearbooks) to the collection.

The Public Relations Achievement Award winner was **Jennifer McBride** of St. Louis County Library. McBride helped coordinate the promotion of the opening of St. Louis County's renovated Clark Family Branch and Post Event Space and Plaza. She led a Communications team through the creation of press releases, and worked with print and digital media, including "mommy bloggers" online! Several examples of McBride's promotion efforts: For the grand opening of the Post Event Space and Plaza's new 800-seat theatre, St. Louis County's Author Events team scheduled 16 programs, including sold-out events with historian Doris Kearns Goodwin; New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof; novelists Amy Tan, Mo Rocca and Gabrielle Zevin; thriller writer Riley Sager; and young adult author Tomi Adeyemi. To help spread the word of the Clark Family Branch after its grand opening, McBride helped coordinate the sharing of social media content created by patrons visiting the branch for the first time; and posting additional videos and other content to tout the one-of-a-kind spaces at the branch.

Six Missouri libraries won grants through MLA's Access & Innovation Fund grant program. This grant program's purpose is to enhance, support and develop technologies and innovation that improve patrons' access to library services. The 2025 recipients and their winning projects were:

- **Missouri Baptist University**, \$1,573 for "Safe Travels: Mobile Hotspots for Traveling Student Athletes and Scholars"
- **Webster Groves Public Library**, \$2,550 for "Enhancing Literacy Through Storytelling Devices"
- **New Madrid County Library**, \$3,057 for "Technology Upgrades for Rhodes Memorial Branch"
- **Jefferson County Library**, \$2,519 for "Higher Resolution, Wider Reach: Large-Format Printing at JCL"
- **Carrollton Public Library**, \$5,000 for "Digitizing Our Past: A Modern Microfilm Reader for the Public"
- **Jewett Norris Library** (Grundy County): \$4,980 for "Digital Inclusion for Our Early Readers"

Rounding out the awards given to libraries, library systems, and support organizations was the Tiffany C. Mautino Intellectual Freedom Award. The 2025 recipient was the **Missouri Association of School Librarians**. MASL is on the frontlines of the struggle for intellectual freedom in Missouri. MASL and MLA recently reestablished formal connections, initially through collaborations between MLA and MASL's Intellectual Freedom Committees. MASL shares expertise and insights; and collaborate on documents to support the groups' mutual goals. They are to promote access and the freedom to read; and oppose censorship in Missouri libraries.

Also at the October 9 event, two awards were presented for works of literature with Missouri connections.

- The MLA Literary Award recognizes a work by an author with significant ties to Missouri and/or a notable work that highlights the state of Missouri. The winner of this

award is decided on by a committee of Missouri librarians representing public, academic, school and special library facilities. Winners receive a plaque commemorating the award and an honorarium of \$600. The 2025 winner was **Michelle Collins Anderson** for her debut novel *The Flower Sisters*. Anderson, an Ozarks native, has never lost her love for or fascination with the history of this unique area of Missouri. For her first published work, she focused on a tragic piece of Ozark history: the 1928 Bond Dance Hall explosion in West Plains. *The Flower Sisters* is a suspenseful tale set in a small town of recognizable characters hiding their own secrets.

- The Missouri Building Block Picture Book Award is presented annually to the author and illustrator of the picture book voted most popular by preschool children in Missouri's public libraries. This year's winner was **"NO Is All I Know!", written by Chris Grabenstein and illustrated by Leo Espinosa**. It is the story of a young boy who learns to adopt a new, positive attitude (and stop saying "No" so often) when he receives a visit from his cousin, who loves saying "Yes!"

Seven additional awards and two scholarships were presented to Missouri library employees, trustees, and retirees:

- The Ronald G. Bohley Award is sponsored jointly by MLA and C2C Association Management Solutions. It is presented to a person or persons whose actions have led libraries to work better together, and who exemplifies the best efforts to reach out beyond their own institution to further library cooperation throughout Missouri. The 2025 winner was **Emily Jaycox**, Head Librarian of the Missouri Historical Society. From her nominator: "Emily's work has empowered libraries of all sizes and types to participate in statewide and national initiatives. She has led numerous efforts that resulted in formal and informal library collaboration across Missouri. Most notably, she played a key role in the establishment of MoHub--the Missouri consortium that joined DPLA (Digital Public Library of America). . . .She brings people together, sees the big picture, and helps others succeed."
- The 2025 winner of the Outstanding Library Employee Award was **Tarza Tawfiq**, Employee Relations Coordinator of St. Louis County Library. Tawfiq significantly enhanced staff communication, satisfaction and empowerment across the system with several groundbreaking projects. These included the creation of a Staff Development Cohort, adoption of a widely used staff Intranet tool and her work supporting St. Louis County Library's Employee Engagement Committee.
- **Jill Kline**, Student Success Librarian at University of Missouri Libraries, won the Outstanding New Librarian Award. In her first two years at Mizzou, Kline reached thousands of students through instructional sessions and campus-wide events. She created new library learning tools, secured grant funding for a well being book collection and presented at regional conferences, including MLA. Student surveys of her instructional sessions showed that more than 95% of students stated that they would be more likely to use Library tools, because of her guidance. Kline has led instruction sessions for middle and high school students, while co-developing a new graduate library workshop.

- The 2025 winner of the Outstanding Professional Librarian Award was **Amber Carr**, Assistant Library Director & Marketing/Outreach Librarian at Missouri Southern State University's Spiva Library. With grant funding and administrative support, Carr implemented several food preparation/nutrition programs for the campus community, while actively representing the library on campus committees. For one of her projects, Carr obtained funding for a mobile kitchen on campus. She converted a study room into a cooking demonstration classroom and regularly hosted nutrition, budget or similar programs in which students learned a recipe (and received ingredients to take home).
- **Karen Hayden**, former Director of Little Dixie Regional Libraries, was the 2025 Meritorious Achievement Award winner. After working nearly 40 years with the system, Hayden retired in 2016. In the words of her nominator, Hayden "spearheaded two Friends of the Libraries groups, and led staff through tumultuous times with very little turnover. When she retired nearly nine years ago, she left a healthy surplus in the bank, a well-trained staff, and a clear vision for the future."
- The Virginia G. Young Outstanding Service Award recognizes a library trustee for exemplary service in Missouri. The 2025 recipient was **Janet Fraley**, Board Treasurer of Texas County Library in Houston. Through Fraley's work over two decades, Texas County Library branches in Houston, Cabool, Licking and Summersville received improvements. Fraley's careful fiscal management allowed for these improvements while maintaining the same tax levy since the Library's formation in 1950. In the words of her nominator, Fraley "devoted significant time to a project to build a new 7,200-square-foot main library branch in Houston (opening this fall). The \$2.9 million project was financed with a complex array of grants and donations -- as well as some library reserves -- that required considerable effort on her part. . . She is well-respected for all the time and effort, love and care she gives this library system."
- The 2025 winner of the Show Me Youth Services Award was **Hilary Aid**. Aid is a Youth Services Librarian at the Daniel Boone Regional Library. Aid's passion is connecting people to each other. She has applied this skill as the leader of monthly early childhood networking meetings, as the creator of the DBRL Early Childhood Connections Facebook group and as a member of the Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence Committee. She also started the library's bookmobile services to child care centers.
- The Patt Behler Call-to-Conference Award, a scholarship, is given to introduce librarians to the activities and programs of MLA and MLA's Youth Services Community of Interest. This year's winner was **Lisa Kaye Smith**, Youth Services Associate at Springfield-Greene County Library. Smith applies her 15+ years of school library media experience to implement library programs emphasizing critical thinking skills, such as STEM- focused programs. She is also known for her programs that help her young patrons write interactive "puzzle stories."
- **Jimmy Thomas** won the 2025 Ronald G. Bohley Scholarship. This award goes to an individual who has demonstrated high scholastic achievement, a commitment to professionalism and library cooperation, a desire to provide quality service to library patrons and a promise to contribute to Missouri libraries. Thomas is a student in Emporia State University's School of Library and Information Management Program, and a

Community Resource Specialist at Kansas City Public Library. He has developed new programs and strategies for serving homeless patrons. They include a Pathways to Permanent Housing plan that guides patrons through the many steps to find permanent housing.

- The You Belong Scholar program announced its first Scholar Cohort. In Fall 2024, the Missouri Library Association launched the You Belong Scholar Program, a statewide initiative aimed at retaining and developing Missouri library workers from historically underrepresented groups. The You Belong Scholars for 2025-2026 are:
 - **Tarza Tawfiq**, St. Louis County Library
 - **Majiyebo Yacim**, University of Missouri Journalism Library
 - **Rashandra Burnett**, St. Louis County Library
 - **Chayanne Sandoval-Williams**, University of Missouri Kansas City
 - **Nicole Riebe**, St. Louis County Library

MLA is a non-profit organization that serves as a statewide membership organization for individuals working in the field of librarianship. MLA's mission is to promote library services, the profession of librarianship, and cooperation among all types of libraries and organizations concerned with library services in Missouri. Learn more at molib.org.

CONTACT:

Eric Petersen, Chair, Missouri Library Association Awards Committee
ericpetersen@kclibrary.org