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# One Simple Question—One Great Relationship

by Peggy Christensen



Peggy Christensen worked as the teacher-librarian at Millicoma and Sunset Middle Schools before taking the head librarian job at Marshfield High School in Coos Bay, OR. She has been in the library for 14 years. In addition to her regular duties, she also serves as the district librarian for all of the elementary schools. Prior to moving to the library position, she worked 20 years as an English teacher. You can reach her via email at [PeggyC@coos-bay.k12.or.us](mailto:PeggyC@coos-bay.k12.or.us).

One of the first things I did as the new librarian at Marshfield High School was reach out for some expert help from the director of the Coos Bay Public Library (CBPL). The request for an in-service happened quite naturally.

It began with my creating a newsletter, *The Library X-Press*. I sent it to all the librarians and clerks who were in charge of a high school library in all of Coos and parts of Curry County as well as the directors of the public libraries in my town and our sister city, North Bend. Out of that contact there grew an interest in conducting countywide in-service meetings.

I asked CBPL director Carol Ventgen if she would conduct an in-service training on censorship. Hands down, it was one of the best trainings I ever attended. She was organized, purposeful, and had full command of her subject. Because school libraries have considerations that public libraries do not (and vice versa), it led to some healthy discussion and helped us forge some ideas about the direction we needed to take.

Not long after that session, the Coos County Library Cooperative started taking part in “community reads” and asked the high school librarians in the county if they would like to be part of the program. Laurie Nordahl, North Bend High School Librarian, and I definitely did. The two of us got together to plan and share our information on author Craig Lesley’s book, *The Sky Fisherman*. Together we did an evening presentation at the CBPL on Craig Lesley’s other books. The payoff to us (besides getting to participate in the program) was a visit by an author to our campuses. From that point on, both North Bend High School and Marshfield High School have been the recipients of shared author visits. Sometimes we have to take turns (depending on how long the author is scheduled to be in the area) but most of the time we both get a visit.

With the state mandate to form Professional Learning Communities, it seemed natural for the librarians from the two cities and the schools to turn to each other. For me and Laurie, it felt like we were “in the butter” because we went from having no other certified librarian to dialogue with to having a whole committee. It was very rich!

Laurie and I joined Oregon Battle of the Books together. If we were going to give our students practice



opportunities to battle other teams, who better than each other? When it came to picking a venue for the battles to take place, where better than our public library? They jumped on board in a *big* way.

The moderator for the Civil Battle was a former TV anchor from our area. Our judges were the mayors from the two cities. The director and assistant directors from both North Bend Public Library and CBPL filled in all the other roles, plus they provided the snacks! The gallery was full and the competition friendly. Okay, okay, in the end, North Bend scored one more point than Marshfield.

When our teams went to Regionals, the Marshfield students attended as well to support North Bend who made it out of the elimination round.

Laurie shared with me that her principal asked for a list of the OBOB books because he wanted to read them *and* he featured their OBOB teams in an assembly. I shared with her that my superintendent, plus the associate director from CBPL and another assistant from there volunteered as coaches. (But I would like her to know that *this year*, the superintendent, the principal, the assistant principal, the director of human resources, the account, payroll clerk and a host of other people have read books for me and written questions, and the superintendent, two librarians from CBPL and one from NBPL are coaching the teams.) In the end, it isn't about the win/loss column—it's about the relationships that are being built along the way.

Laurie serves on the North Bend Public Library board. She believes that is a good way to make a connection between the public and school libraries. It is also a good way to keep each other informed about programs.

Ultimately, it makes sense that the public and school libraries work together. We both need each other, after all. Perhaps, like me, you will make new friends. In the case of North Bend and Coos Bay, we doubled our fortunes by working closely together. 🐾

