

Bancroft library's CEO receives award for professional practice



By Tony Pearson

Vanessa Holm, CEO of Bancroft's public library for the past four years, just completed her Master's degree in Library and Information Science from San Jose State University in California. But she didn't leave town to obtain the degree, nor did she stop her work at the town library. She took the degree - her second Master's - through on-line work. She worked through San Jose because of the excellence of its library science program, and because no Canadian universities had a similar on-line course available. So while she worked her way through courses as diverse as coding, children's programming, and social media marketing, she applied her knowledge everyday at work to the task of strengthening library services in our local area.

As if performing a full-time executive job while taking post-graduate studies wasn't impressive enough, she also edits the professional review of the Ontario Public Library Association, and works as a professional development project lead for Librarians Without Borders (LWB). This organization was established to reduce inequities in access to information and learning resources in less developed areas. Holm started as an intern with LWB, designing literacy activities, storytime children's programs, and homework clubs. Now she is developing new materials for librarian training in Guatemala, so the librarians can empower indigenous youth, women, and families to develop the skills they need to change their lives and their communities.

With such a record of accomplishment, the faculty of the San Jose Library Science program bestowed on Holm their Jean Wichers award. This is given annually to the student who exhibits the most outstanding knowledge and ability in actual professional practice. Asked why she went into library science rather than continuing as an academic, Holm replied: "I grew up surrounded by books; my mother encouraged a love of literacy and made visits to our local library a regular weekly activity. I came to recognize the huge role that libraries play in community development."

Her experiences at university honed that interest: "My interest in librarianship stemmed from the completion of my Master's Degree in Sociology from Carleton University and Bachelor's Degree in Popular Culture and Communications at Brock University, as well as my previous experience as a teaching assistant at those two schools. As a teaching assistant I always recognized the importance of the library in students' academic development and made sure that their interactive learning experiences involved library instruction." All in all, Holm's achievements have certainly brought quite a bit of lustre to the Bancroft library.