

Someone You Should Meet: Library Director Cheryl Ashley

By Jillian Zarr

You have probably already met Ms. Cheryl Ashley if you have been in the Verona Public Library. Her gregarious nature and sunny outlook ensures that when you come to her library, you feel welcomed. But what is her day really like? We find out.

Q: How do you describe your job?

A: Enjoyable and challenging. When you work in a library, you're seeped in a world that's full of hope, potential, scholarship, discovery. Books offer all that and there's no better environment for employment. The people who come into the library are all book-lovers, and you can't help bonding with like-minded folk. The same goes for my co-workers.



Q: What do you like most about being library director?

A: Collection development, which is selecting the books that will go into the collection— it is a joy to read the professional reviews, to keep up with publishing trends.

I'm also still children's librarian, my position at Verona Library before being promoted to Director. This entails development for the children's collection, as well, planning programming and story time, research into early literacy development for best practices in children's librarianship. Working with children is a joy and very rewarding.

Q: Are there any challenges you face as the library moves temporarily?

A: Going from a building with three floors to just two rooms to provide library services is a challenge. There is no such thing as "behind-the-scenes"

and this makes performing administrative duties tricky. It also limits programming.

Q: What would you like to see happen here in town to make it even better for the Verona residents?

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A: I think Verona is a very fine town. Because I work with the people behind the scenes who are responsible for public services, I know that Verona residents are well taken care of. I'd like to see a more vibrant business community, a small supermarket (I dream of a Trader Joe's in Verona), but space is a major issue.

Q: Where did you grow up, and what is your educational background?

A: I was born in Brooklyn, and my family moved to Westfield when I was 8. I attended Holy Trinity Grammar and High Schools in Westfield, and earned my BA from New York University, my MLS at the Palmer School of Library and Information Services. I currently live in West Caldwell, on Passaic Avenue.

Q: You work so hard as the library director. What do you do for fun?

A: I'm a student of Irish harp, and enjoy learning about the history of the Celtic music I'm learning as well. I'm also taking an online course to be a Certified Therapy Musician, which will enable me to play harp in nursing homes, hospice care, hospitals, in an effort to provide some comfort to patients.

Q: What are your favorite books? Are you reading anything now?

A: My favorite books would probably be *Gaudy Night*, by Dorothy L. Sayers, and Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. I go back to those two every few years.

Right now, I'm going through the entire No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency series, by Alexander McCall-Smith. I've read most of them in the past but in these difficult times, it's comforting to be

immersed in the gentle world of Precious Ramwotse and escape to Botswana. I also re-read the Miss Read series from time to time to escape to the English countryside. Two recent reads that I'd highly recommend are *My Mrs. Brown*, by William D. Norwich, and *Himself*, by Jess Kidd. There are several mystery series that I'm devoted to, among them, Sayer's Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries, *The Peculiar Crimes Unit*, by Christopher Fowler, Rebus mysteries by Ian Rankin, and many cozy mystery series.

Q: Tell us something about yourself that we'd be surprised to know.

A: Books literally changed my life. I was reading Sayers, who frequently included snippets of poetry by John Donne (Lord Peter's passion) into the text. I didn't know anything about Donne and realized that despite my love of reading, I was not well read. I was determined to fix that. (I was a single mom at the time, in my early 30's and working full-time at Revlon in NY.) I enrolled for night courses at NYU to major in literature and 10 years later, had earned my BA in Literary Studies. By that time, I knew that I belonged in libraries, and immediately started a Masters course in Library Science.

Q: What do you like most about working in Verona?

A: I love working in Verona because the people who live in town and come into the library are wonderful. Local government is supportive of the library and the various municipal departments work together to improve the general quality of life for residents.

Q: What are some words of wisdom that you try to live by?

A: Be kind.



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