

New Library Director Gears Up For Opening

Tuesday, 19 November 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/131119.new_librarian.mp3{/audio}

Library Director Katie Baxter stands among the bookshelves at the new public library. The building will open on December 10 after a grand opening ceremony the evening before, on December 9. Brianna Gibbs Photo

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The new library is still three weeks away from opening its doors to the public, but its new director is hard at work making sure things come together by then. Katie Baxter hails from Massachusetts, but arrived in Kodiak last month in time to help move the library's materials from the old building downtown, to the new one on signal hill. Baxter said her decision to leave Massachusetts came about last June, when she began seeking out employment opportunities beyond the East coast.

"And I was just at the point where I needed to think outside the box a little bit. The American Librarian Association is a wonderful professional association of usually an average of 65,000 members. So it's a pretty big organization. And they have a job list. So I just sat down one rainy Saturday and pulled up the list and I could sort by state. So I picked five states. And Alaska has always intrigued me, never been, but I can remember being five years old and saying to people I want to go to Alaska. So I thought I'd start with Alaska."

She said there were several job openings in the state, but Kodiak's job description and aspirations for the new building drew her in and ultimately helped her decide to apply. Baxter said her love of literature spans well into her childhood, but it wasn't until she got a job at her college library that she became passionate about libraries themselves.

“And I had the opportunity to learn that as a librarian I really can just have the best job of facilitating learning for any individual who walks through the door. And that’s just what a library is all about. It’s a place of learning, exploration, and so being able to think of a library as that kind of broad, and at the same time very specialized place for imagination, information sharing, just personal knowledge, I just decided I’m being a librarian.”

Since then, Baxter has worked in other college and high school libraries and provided youth services at public libraries across Massachusetts.

“And most recently I was at the Irish Cultural Center of New England, which was fun. That was a place where the folks were thinking of building a new building and there was very specialized collection. So it’s fun sometimes to go back and forth between focusing on everything, all topics, and then really being able to devote time to just dig into and create a very specialized collection.”

Baxter has been in Kodiak for almost a month and has helped with the interior set up and move of the new library.

“These next 22 days will be really dedicated to getting the space ready for the public. So we have to think about the way space appears and what people are expecting or assuming takes place in different spaces around the building. We have to make it welcoming and clear for everybody. And that’s great fun. Rethinking services and what happens at the circulation desk and then coming up with programming. Because pretty soon it will be the winter and we do want to have something in place to be activities to be offering people. So it’s that logistical kind of activity at this point.”

She said she’s eager to meet more of the community and so far is very pleased with what she has seen and experienced. The new library is set to officially open on December 10, but there will be a grand opening the evening before on December 9.