

Beth Barlow: Directors' Award Recipient

By Lynne Russell.

Beth Barlow, Chief Librarian at Surrey Public Library, is the recipient of this year's BC Library Directors' Award of Excellence. This award recognizes outstanding leadership and service in public librarianship by a member of the Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD). The award was presented to Beth at the September 30 meeting of the ABCPLD, during which colleagues praised her outstanding service and its positive lasting impact on public libraries.



Beth Barlow. Photo by Surrey Public Library.

As Edel Toner-Rogala, Chief Librarian at Burnaby Public Library and 2009 recipient of the award stated: "It is not so much what Beth has achieved, it is how she has achieved that sets her apart." The following is excerpted from Beth's nomination statement.

Outstanding service

Beth has worked in libraries for over 39 years and over that time she has led staff, supported boards, and created and contributed to work environments that encourage innovation and respond to and reflect community and customer needs. She has also committed much of her personal and professional life to the causes of literacy and cultural inclusion.

As the Chief Librarian for Surrey Libraries for over a decade she has effectively balanced organizational need with sensitivity to stakeholders – customers, staff, taxpayers, donors, community leaders and politicians – in managing a complex library system that must respond to a broad range of needs and priorities while reflecting the diverse nature of the community it serves.

As a senior manager with the City of Surrey, Beth has worked to ensure that Surrey Libraries, the needs of its customers and lifelong learning remain at the forefront of civic life. She led the highly successful rebranding of Surrey Libraries in 2010; it is her vision of the public library of the future that is reflected in the design and function of the new Surrey City Centre Library. In 2011, Beth was awarded a Surrey Women in Business Award in the category of not-for-profit.

Beth has represented public libraries and the library community-at-large through her involvement with a variety of local, regional and national organizations and professional associations, and she has brought her management, leadership and community-building skills to those relationships. As just one example at the local level, in taking the lead role in the development of Surrey's "Learning for Life" strategy, Beth ensured that her library remained at the heart of the literacy discussion and she demonstrated the value librarians can bring to community initiatives.

Positive lasting impact on public libraries

On the national level: Beth is a past President of the Canadian Library Association and she has continued to provide her insights to that association as it strives to reinvent itself. Beth has also been a Canadian delegate to the OCLC Members and Global Councils since 2007 where she has ensured that the perspectives of Canadian libraries were voiced.

On the provincial level: Beth chaired the One-Card Committee that developed the policies and procedures which have guided the BC One Card Program since its inception. Every library card holder in the province has benefitted from Beth's efforts to ensure equity of access for all British Columbians.

On the regional level: Beth played an important role in creating the process by which Public Library InterLINK set about hiring an Executive Director, its first in many years. There were many stakeholders and logistical problems, but Beth's communication and leadership skills helped ensure a successful outcome. Beth's willingness to mentor new Chief Librarians is another way in which she has had an impact on public libraries in the region.

On the local level: Beth's impact on Surrey Libraries has been profound. In her ten years with Surrey Libraries, Beth has brought considerable leadership, organizational and public relations skills to building a vibrant, responsive organization that meets the educational, literacy and recreation needs of Surrey residents. She has also stewarded an important civic organization through a period of significant growth and change. The new Surrey City Centre Library,

officially opened in September of this year, will be a lasting testament to the impact Beth has had on Surrey and its people.

Lynne Russell is Library Director at Port Moody Public Library and current Chair of the Association of BC Public Library Directors.