Halsted Bernard 0:04

Hello, everyone, I'm Halsted Bernard, the current chair of the Public Library Division of the Oregon Library Association, and I'm here today to announce the winner of the 2022 Pearl Award. The Pearl Award is presented annually by the Public Library Division to a deserving individual employed in any capacity in an Oregon Public Library who has displayed exceptional effort and excellence. This award honors someone who, like a pearl in an oyster, agitates, creates change over time, and is highly valued. On behalf of the rest of the Public Library Division board, I am proud to announce this year's winner of the Pearl Award, Ericka Brunson-Rochette of the Deschutes Public Library. While the Public Library Division board received many excellent nominations, Ericka stood out, especially as a change-maker with innovative ideas that she put into action in service to the community and the library. Here's what Ericka's nominators had to say about her.

Max Macias 1:06

Hi there. My name is Max Macias. I'm an independent librarian living in Oregon. I serve on the OLA EDIA Committee that is co-chaired by Ericka, and I'm super happy, pleased, proud, ecstatic to announce that Ericka has won the Pearl Award given by the Public Library Division of the Oregon Library Association. I would like to read a short nomination that I wrote for Ericka, I hope you like it; I hope it's meaningful. Ericka has been a strong leader and co-chair of the OLA EDIA Committee. She has been open to new ideas and has been an amazing representative between the OLA EDIA Committee and OLA as well as the State Library. Ericka embodies the values of libraries and EDIA principles. She is a leader, and in libraries that is a rarity. Congratulations, Ericka. Yes! Thank you for your work, your dedication, and your service. Thank you.

Halsted Bernard 2:15

This is from nominator Pia Alliende. "I don't know too much about this award but when I read that the award honors someone who, like a pearl in an oyster, agitates, creates change over time, and is highly valued and works in an Oregon Public Library, I couldn't stop thinking about Ericka. She is that real pearl that I wish all public libraries had. I know all of you working in public libraries are pearls but it happens that Ericka is the one I know better, and I want her to represent all of you. The way Ericka has supported students and my role in the school district goes above and beyond words, and the way she is leading the OLA EDIA Committee despite the toll and time it is taking on her, deserves not just this award. I just thought if we don't start recognising the work of people like Ericka, nobody will. Ericka is always thinking about others, and especially about breaking barriers for library workers and users that have been neglected by public libraries or haven't been reached out enough. She takes risks, is bold and always willing to apply an equity, diverse, inclusive and anti-racist lens in every circumstance and consciously decides not to do business as usual. That's hard work and takes emotional and physical labor, but she still chooses not to take the easy road. And she does it with grace and honesty. She is so considerate of everybody's voice and feelings, and at the same time is on top of things in a very professional way. She spends time hearing all voices and puts time into getting to know people on a more personal level, before making a decision. That might frustrate some people, but I consider it a virtue that not too many leaders have." Thank you, Pia, for your nomination for Ericka.

Melissa Anderson 2:33

Hi, my name is Melissa Anderson and I am the Campus Engagement and Research Services Librarian at Southern Oregon University. I nominated Ericka Brunson-Rochette for the Pearl Award. In addition to being a fabulous Youth Services Librarian at the Deschutes Public Library, Ericka Brunson-Rochette is also a highly effective leader. I know Ericka from her work on the EDI and Antiracism Committee of the Oregon Library Association. She is co-chair of that committee, and she brings her passion for social justice, her creativity, and her empathy to the table and is essential to all the work that that committee does. As a leader, Ericka makes everyone feel welcome and that all voices are heard. She's not afraid to make decisions and she leads by example. She shows thoughtfulness and care in everything that she does. I feel very lucky to know her and to be able to work with her. She really is a pearl and is highly deserving of this honor. Thank you.

Halsted Bernard 5:19

This nomination comes from Marci Ramiro-Jenkins. "Ericka applies a great level of passion, dedication and excellence in everything she does. As a children's librarian she went above and beyond during COVID-19, bringing "indoors joy" for our children, innovating and utilizing social media to communicate with little ones, via online storytime, I caught myself many times, as an adult, clicking on the Deschutes Public Library's links to hear the stories, and be surrounded by Ericka's grace, charisma, and enthusiasm. I am also in awe of her commitment with the OLA Equity Diversity Inclusion and Anti-racism (EDIA) Committee, Ericka is an emerging leader in the EDIA field today, she is not intimidated by intricate projects, in fact, she is leading one of the most innovative OLA's projects today, the 'Overdue' podcast, which will connect us to so many voices within librarianship, will celebrate and highlight library workers, who just like Ericka, are making a difference at Oregon libraries through hard work, dedication, focus and drive, voices who will inspire many others. I believe Ericka's passion to serve her library and OLA is contagious, every time I attend a meeting where Ericka is present, I feel energized by her intelligence and by her desire to contribute and serve. I recruited Ericka to volunteer at OLA a while ago and I truly believe she embodies the name of this award very well, Ericka is definitely a precious jewel and we are so fortunate to have her as part of our Oregon Library community." Thank you so much, Marci, for your nomination of Ericka for this award. All right. Congratulations, Ericka, on being our 2022 Pearl award winner. I was just hoping that you could tell us a little bit about what winning the 2022 Pearl Award means to you.

Ericka Brunson-Rochette 7:20

Well, thank you so much. I am beyond grateful and thankful to have been the recipient of this award. I did not see it coming, so it was a wonderful surprise. But it also is a very humbling experience as well. I think an award that really puts value and thought into inciting and creating change over time, is something that should be appreciated, especially in a profession that I feel like is constantly shifting and changing is really hard to put down those roots and to find things that are really worth putting those time and efforts into. And for me what is worth my time and my efforts are relationships and people. So I feel like this speaks to my heart and soul as a person and as a librarian. That really building people up and recognizing all of the wonderful contributions and change that they create every day is just so powerful. So, one, I want to thank my nominators for putting my name in the ring for this, and also to the Public Library Division for selecting me for this award. But I really, really want to thank all of the folks that show up every day for their communities, for their libraries, and are really contributing to being the change that they want to see. I want this recognition to be for all of us. And I want all of those people to know that they are pearls in their own right. And I see them, and I appreciate them.

Halsted Bernard 8:59

Wonderful. Wonderful. Thank you. Your nominators mentioned your work with the EDI and Antiracism Committee. What's something that you wish more people knew about the EDI and Antiracism Committee?

Ericka Brunson-Rochette 9:13

Oh, there are lots of things. I mean, I want to start out with the fact that this is really arduous work. That committee isn't one that you join to, you know, spice up your resume or to network and make those those connections to help accelerate a career. I mean, it is work that you put into trying to create a lasting change. And it's also work that there isn't always going to be instant gratification for, or you might not be able to see a lot of the impact that you're making, but you have to believe that you're showing up and you are in fact creating that change. I especially feel for the members of our committee that are committee members of color, or maybe even our neurodivergent members, or LGBTQIA members that are volunteering their time, I mean, this committee, we spend, at least at minimum five hours a month, if not more, working on projects, doing this work. And a lot of those committee members can't just say, you know, okay, I'm done. Like, this has been a lot, it's feeling really heavy, they can't show up and work for creating that change, and like spaces and systems that they have to live in, too. So I just really want to thank all of the folks that are doing the work, whether it's on this committee, or if it's in your own personal lives and your own personal time, it is hard work, but it's very valuable. We'll be actually putting out a call for new committee members. I plan on doing that this afternoon. But I know that this video will come out after that. So if you haven't already seen it, be on the lookout for the opportunity to join the EDIA Committee. And an another thing I want to give a plug for is our new podcast called "Overdue: Weeding Out Oppression in Libraries." And we are so grateful to have the support of the Oregon Library Association, and funding and support from the State Library of Oregon on that podcast. We have released two episodes so far. And we have a third one coming out next Tuesday with Dr. Debbie Reese, who is the author of the American Indians in Children's Literature blog. And we've got some really great interviews coming up with some more Oregonians, like Star Khan at Driftwood Public Library, as well as some national names that you might recognize, like Loida Garcia-Febo, past ALA President, and the Executive Director of ALA, Tracie Hall, we've got an interview with her that will be released in the next few months. So it's something that is very near and dear to me, and I know to the other committee members, so if you haven't had a chance to check it out, it is on the front page, I think of the Oregon Library Association's website, you can get a link to it.

Halsted Bernard 12:12

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Ericka, I just have another question for you. Your nominators also mentioned how you help children and families during the pandemic, with social media and with online storytimes. Do you have a favorite memory you can share of connecting with your library community while we were all forced apart?

Ericka Brunson-Rochette 12:34

That is a great question. I have lots of memories from that time. I think this is a unique question for me, because I actually moved to Oregon at the start of the pandemic. So I moved and started at the Deschutes Public Library at the very end of March of 2020. And so it was a lot of change. I moved from Washington state, so not too far away. But I was excited to really embed myself in the state and in the community that I was in and, you know, was immediately forced to, to stay at home and kind of like shut out some of those opportunities to really learn the new environment and the new community that I was in. So when we started to talk about shifting to online programming and digital services, I, well, I'm always happy to jump in and like try new things. But I was also really nervous as a youth librarian, because I know that having those connections to like your librarian to that face that you see and that voice that you hear are so important. And I have a face and a voice that no one knew here. So creating those videos, sometimes I felt like I was just kind of putting them out into like nothingness. And maybe people were skipping mine because, you know, they don't know me, they've never come to my storytimes. And I was very, very humbled and surprised to find out when we started back up with in-person programming and in-person storytimes, which for us was two full years after the shutdown, that so many families were like, "Oh my gosh, it's Miss Ericka!" And their kids were just like, you know, just shocked to see me and they're like, "You're a celebrity in our house. Like we watch all your videos." And all of those videos that I was sharing and also hoping that families in Washington that I was their library and I was that face I was that voice they're connecting with, I also was creating new relationships and really making an impact with the community here too. And I wouldn't call myself a celebrity, but it is very just rewarding to know that even during such a difficult time, I was and we all were still making an impact and we still are today. So I hope that that is something that can help us feel uplifted when sometimes we feel like we have lost the power that we have, or our abilities to do the work in the ways and in the environments that we know, that we still can really make a difference. And I'm so thankful to work in a state with so many people who show up every day, dedicated and willing to make a difference.

Halsted Bernard 15:22

That's so excellent. And going back to what you said earlier about relationships and people and how important they are. Thank you so much for sharing a little bit of yourself with us all. And again, congratulations on being our 2022 Pearl Award winner. You're truly a pearl, Ericka, and we're so excited and happy to have you in Oregon libraries. So thank you.

Ericka Brunson-Rochette 15:44

Thank you, and thank you again for the recognition.

Halsted Bernard 15:47

Thank you, Ericka. And thank you to Pia, Melissa, Max, and Marci for nominating Ericka for the 2022 Pearl award. And congratulations again, Ericka, on being our Pearl Award winner!