

Sacramento Library Recoups Embezzled Cash

For any library system, getting a check for \$480,000 would be a cause to celebrate. In the case of the Sacramento Public Library (SPL), CA, though, that's particularly true. Instead of the sort of donation every library director dreams of, the influx of money represents a restitution payment that helps the library to recoup some of the more than \$800,000 embezzled by two former employees, bringing a close to an unpleasant chapter in SPL's history.

In late 2011, former facilities director Dennis Nilsson, who oversaw payments made to contractors for construction and renovation work at libraries throughout the system, and James Mayle, who ran security for the branches, were convicted—along with Mayle's wife, Janie Rankins-Mayle—of defrauding SPL out of nearly \$825,000 in phony maintenance charges. Mayle and his wife ran a shell company that drastically inflated the prices of typical handyman work performed in Sacramento's libraries.

Over four years, contractors submitted invoices to the shell corporation for \$560,000 worth of work, according to the *Modesto Bee*. The

fraudsters, in turn, submitted more than \$1.3 million in bills to the library via Nilsson, who approved the charges while the trio pocketed the difference. In December 2011, all three were convicted on charges of grand theft and bribery. Mayle was also convicted on conflict of interest charges. All three are currently serving jail sentences ranging from four to 14 years.

The financial loss, discovered in 2008, came at a particularly tough time for SPL, as the economy was suffering through the worst of the financial collapse. The loss had worse ramifications than just squeezing the library's budget, said SPL director Rivkah Sass. It damaged the library's standing in the community, as well. "You want to get support from your constituents and foundation in tough financial times," said Sass. "When something like this occurs, it impacts faith in the library as an institution, so you have a higher mountain to climb when it comes to private support."

While the embezzlement created hardships, Sass said, it also provided a necessary wake-up call that's helped the system get its financial house in order in the years since. "It was a real learning experience," Sass told *Hotline*, "in finding out what policies

Interview

Marc Thompson

Marc Thompson is the voice of the *Star Wars* extended universe, having narrated close to two dozen audiobooks set in that world. *Hotline* talked to Thompson about fandom, pronunciation, and voicing iconic characters.



Were you a *Star Wars* fan before narrating these books?

I've been a lifelong *Star Wars* fan. When

I got the audition for legacy of the force, I took it very, very seriously. I wanted this job very badly.

Is it difficult to keep track of the pronunciation of all of the characters and locations?

Pronunciations are very difficult to keep track of. When I'm preparing a book I often go to Wookieepedia for research.

What is it like to embody these characters who are so beloved and well known?

It is so much fun. I picture them acting it all out as I'm reading the books. For the most part it is easy to imitate the main characters because of watching the movies. The only one that can be a bit challenging sometimes is my Lando Calrissian.

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Paralibrarian of the Year

Library Journal will honor one support staffer with the 15th annual Paralibrarian of the Year award, sponsored by DEMCO, in its March 1, 2014, issue.

Learn more to submit your nominations at ow.ly/rprQf.

Postmark deadline: January 13, 2014

you need to have and don't have in place." For example, SPL was nearly five years behind on its financial audit schedule when Sass took the helm in 2009. SPL is now not only up-to-date on its audits, said Sass, but has new policies in place for dealing with vendors, contractors, and procurement to help ensure that no one can game the system again.

Being able to recover even a portion of the embezzled assets is a rarity, said assistant district attorney Mike Blazina, who worked on the case. In most situations like this one, people who defraud their employers spend the cash immediately and not on assets that can be seized later. "In many [instances], there are not sufficient funds left for a restitution to be made," Blazina told *Hotline*. "The money is generally squandered. They gamble it or spend it on things of no lasting value." Since the three conspirators in this case spent the money on more lasting assets like homes, there was a rare opportunity to recoup some of the losses.

For Sass, while the money is welcome, there are no immediate plans for it, though she admits having to fight an impulse to use lots of it to improve SPL's collections. More important than cash, though, is closure. Rather than having to live down an embarrassing moment in the library's history, Sass said, SPL staff "can say 'Yes, that happened, it's over, we did the best we could. And now we have libraries to run.'"

Advocates Challenge Ethnic Studies Ban

The nonprofit Freedom To Read Foundation (FTRF), joined by key library and learning advocates, on November 25 filed an amicus brief with the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in *Arce v. Huppenthal*, a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of an Arizona statute that bans ethnic studies. The statute violates students' First Amendment rights to receive information and is unconstitutionally broad, Barbara M. Jones, FTRF's executive director, told *Hotline*.

Arizona Revised Statute 15-112, passed in 2010, eventually led to the dismantling of a successful Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD). The district faced the loss of significant state funding if it kept the program in place, so books and other learning materials were removed from classrooms and banned from use.

Several students from the MAS program and teachers then challenged that decision in federal court on both First Amendment and Equal Protection grounds, and a protracted legal battle followed. Although the First Federal District Court earlier this year found some of the statute unconstitutional, it upheld the remainder of its provisions, so the plaintiffs have now appealed to the Ninth Circuit.

Joining the FTRF as signatories to the amicus brief are the American

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The LibraryAware Community Award emphasizes the library's engagement with the community and will recognize a library or library system that has demonstrated its ability to make its community "aware" of what the library can do for it—and has delivered on that promise. The award will be given by *Library Journal* and funded by LibraryAware, a product of EBSCO Publishing's NoveList Division.

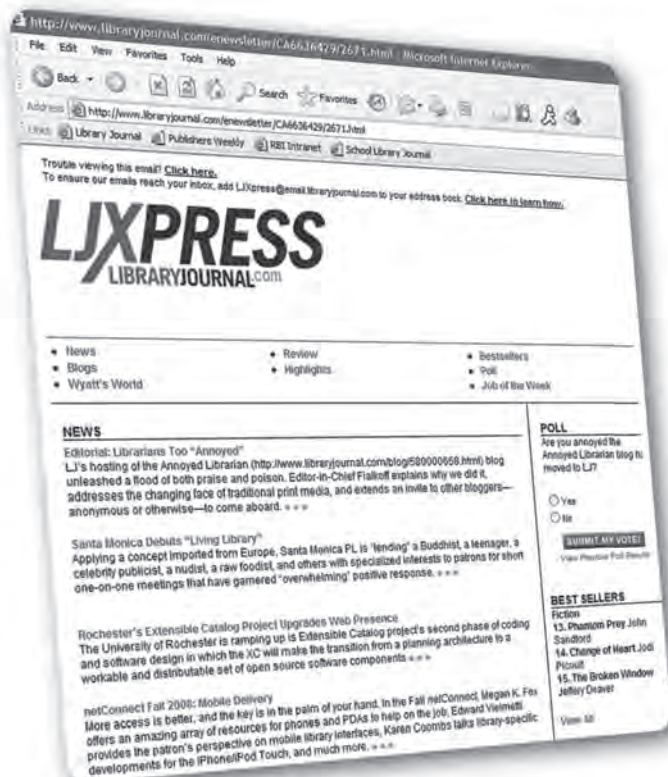
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Library Association (ALA), American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE), Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), Black Caucus of ALA (BCALA), Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF), National Association for Ethnic Stud-

ies (NAES), National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and REFORMA: The National Association To Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking.

Many of these advocates have been monitoring Arizona for years, especially because the new statute “seemed politically and racially motivated,” Isabel Espinal, president of REFORMA, told *Hotline*. “This wonderful curriculum,” she said, “was addressing a lot of issues within the schools. Finally these students’ needs were being addressed, and they were succeeding.”

In response, REFORMA helped ALA create a resolution—which focused on intellectual freedom—during ALA’s 2012 Midwinter Meeting and passed its own resolution that addressed meeting the needs of Latino students. ABFFE, meanwhile, is among those supporter groups that have been waiting in the wings for the chance to sign an amicus brief in support of the cause.

“We wanted to do everything that we could to fight this,” Chris Finan, ABFFE president, told *Hotline*. “Never have I heard a story like this in which books were removed from the classroom under the eyes of the students and thrown into boxes that actually had the word *banned* written on them. I spent a lot of time verifying, in fact, that that’s what these people did; it was completely shocking.”

MEETING ALL STUDENTS’ NEEDS

Several groups are counted as key supporters even though they were not able to join the brief, FTRF’s Jones and REFORMA’s Espinal said. Among these are advocacy group Librotráfico, which fights to get Latino books into libraries, and its “fearless leader” Tony Diaz, and Save Ethnic Studies, a Tucson-based advocacy group that offers a host of data and other resources proving the efficacy of such programs with students.

“I was totally inspired by Tony,” Jones said. “He has won awards in the library community for his work on making all of us aware of how des-

Madison Central Library Hosts Local Public Access TV

The struggling public access TV station in Madison, WI, WYOU, has a new lease on life, courtesy of Madison Public Library (MPL). Library staff and station volunteers described the new partnership as a win-win situation: the station eliminates its rent costs and takes advantage of the library’s media lab and equipment, while the library gets a batch of potential new volunteers and media teachers with years of experience and the chance to experiment with serving as an incubator for community-produced media.

Near the end of 2010, WYOU saw its funding slashed when a new state law eliminated the small surcharge for public education and government television programming previously paid by Wisconsin cable TV subscribers. Just paying the rent on the studio space became an exercise in “constant fundraising and counting on membership,”



according to WYOU board chair Barbara Vedder. “It’s been a real hard struggle, as we’ve looked for ways to stay alive and be sustainable and pay the costs of running an organization like this,” said Vedder.

While WYOU has been grappling with finances, the library opened a new Central Branch earlier this fall. When the idea of bringing WYOU into the fold was raised to Trent Miller, the Maker program coordinator at MPL’s Central Library, he jumped at the chance. Miller oversees the branch’s Bubbler program, which works to engage patrons interested in creating things at the library, from podcasts to video games to 3-D models. “As part of the Bubbler program, we have a dedicated media lab, and we thought WYOU would be a good mix for that,” said Miller.

That sentiment was echoed by Vedder, who feels the new partnership between the two organizations has the potential to raise WYOU’s profile in the community after a rough couple of years and help to bring an infusion of new life and new interest to the station. And now that the station is transmitting its signal from the library’s more central location, residents can see WYOU’s programming more clearly. The library is also helping to bring WYOU programming to the web, streaming the station’s content from its servers.

On the library’s side, Miller told *Hotline*, “We get their people [for the young media lab] who are interested in the same things we are.” And library patrons get easy access to a channel that can help them get the things they create in the media lab into the wider world. “The hope is that with the new media lab, the people who are creating content for us will see WYOU as a way to get their creations out there,” Miller said.

Photo courtesy of Madison Public Library.

perate this situation is and how damaged kids get if they don't have access to books about their own culture." This is a key point in FTRF's brief, she said.

"It is important that Latino children have access to books and curriculum about their own heritage and in their own languages," Espinal told *Hotline*. "Without this information, they simply cannot thrive as full human beings." In addition, "These students are living in a very oppressive environment," she said. "One of the issues around that is how immigrants are viewed and how immigrants are treated in Arizona. What [MAS] students say is that for the first time in their lives they felt like they mattered, at a very basic level. It just shows the oppressive atmosphere that they've often had to live under."

THE WAITING GAME

Looking ahead, advocates expect the Ninth Circuit decision to take many months, and a court date has yet to be scheduled.

FTRF plans to host events around the country with its affiliate partners to create awareness and "keep the ball rolling regardless of how the court decides," Jones told *Hotline*. "We will continue to educate people about the importance of Latino studies."

Nonprofit To Expand Broadband in Schools

EducationSuperHighway (ESH) announced that it is launching a comprehensive national effort to upgrade broadband access in America's schools, funded by Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg's Startup:Education organization, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and several other groups. The nonprofits have pledged a multiyear investment to bring digital learning access to all of the nation's K-12 students.



The yearlong building project at the **West Branch** (pictured) of Berkeley Public Library, CA, ended on December 14 with the reopening of the now 9,300 square foot facility, replacing a smaller structure originally built in 1923 and enlarged in 1974. A 2008 bond measure financed the \$7.5 million effort, which began in May 2012 (see *Hotline*, 6/25/12). Among the changes are substantial seismic and accessibility upgrades and sustainable features that will allow the facility to operate as a zero net energy library. Newly installed photovoltaics "offset dependence on the energy grid and take advantage of natural lighting and ventilation opportunity throughout." The new library includes a study room, a teen zone, comfortable seating, a picture book nook, and a multipurpose community room. The design team consists of Harley Ellis Devereaux Architects, West Bay Builders, and Kitchell CEM, with public art from WOWHAUS: Scott Constable and Ene Osteraas-Constable.

November 13 marked the groundbreaking for the L-shaped expansion to the **Baldwin City**

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"Game-changing technologies are transforming teaching and learning, but over 40 million students are being left behind without the Internet access and Wi-Fi they need to take full advantage of digital learning," said Evan Marwell, CEO of ESH. "If we want our children to be compet-

Public Library, KS. The 5,958 square foot library will gain 3,220 square feet in the \$777,000 project, conducted by Gene Fritzel Construction. Among the changes will be the relocation of the Kansas and local history collections to the new structure, while a dedicated young adult area will take over the vacated space. Also, a meeting room will be built to accommodate the Baldwin City Council and the municipal court, per

BaldwinCity.com. The work is being financed through \$500,000 from a bond measure and funding approved by the library board.

The **Daniel K. Inouye Center for Democratic Leadership** at the University of Hawaii, Mānoa, will be designed by Clifford Planning & Architecture (CPA) LLC and Pei Cobb Freed & Partners LLP; CPA is the architect of record. The project had undergone some recent financial setbacks, but the Board of Regents finally approved \$5 million in state bonds, according to the *Star Advertiser*.

An open house was held on November 13 to celebrate the completion of a Better Building, Better Service project at the **Iowa City Public Library**. The \$450,000 effort, with \$250,000 from the Iowa City Public Library Friends Foundation, affected every department in the 81,276 square foot building and included the addition of a children's technology center, self-checkout stations, electronic bulletin boards, and, for students grades seven through 12, the Koza Family Teen Center.

itive in the global knowledge economy, we must upgrade the Internet infrastructure in America's public schools."

Over the last 12 months, 600,000 students, teachers, and administrators have tested their school's Internet access as part of ESH's National School

Speed Test, the organization noted. The results showed that 72 percent of America's public schools lack the broadband they need for digital learning.

As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) plans reforms of E-Rate—the program that provides discounted Internet access and telecommunications services to U.S. schools and libraries—ESH is hoping to offer better solutions to modernize and strengthen it, according to the organization's leaders and its new nonprofit partners in this initiative. Above all, they say, the most urgent focus needs to be on expanding broadband capacity in schools.

"When schools and teachers have access to reliable Internet connections, students can discover new skills and ideas beyond the classroom," said Zuckerberg. "The future of our economy and society depend largely on the next generation using and building new online tools and services, and I'm glad to support EducationSuperHighway's work."

Education Experts Split Over PISA Score Meaning

American teens scored about average in reading and science and below average in mathematics compared to their counterparts worldwide on the most recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the results of which were released December 3 by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The 2012 findings—the latest available for the exam, which is given every three years—showed little improvement in U.S. students' scores over 2009 levels, even as the scores of students in other countries improved during the same period. The results have sparked debate among U.S. education experts on the proper way to interpret the major findings in the data—and what relevance the PISA should have to future U.S. education policy.

The 2012 PISA surveyed more than 510,000 15-year-olds in 65 countries—34 OECD countries and 31 partner countries and economies. In the United States, 6,000 students at 161 schools were randomly selected to be tested. Notably, the 2012 version of the exam focused primarily on mathematics, with reading, science, and problem-solving included as minor areas of assessment. Of the 34 OECD countries, the United States ranked about 17th in reading, approximately 21st in science, and around 26th in mathematics (all estimated figures), with "no significant change in these performances over time," according to the OECD.

MORE TESTING REQUIRED?

The reaction of education professionals and other thought leaders to the data has been decidedly mixed. Some stakeholders are beginning to use the findings to champion the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)—adopted by 45 states, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, and the Department of Defense—as the solution to dramatically improving the problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills that U.S. students lack.

However, some say the PISA findings actually prove that the emphasis on testing U.S. students in recent years has hindered their learning progress and therefore should not be the way to move forward with CCSS and other reforms. Others noted, above all, that international comparisons do little to paint an accurate picture of U.S. schools and their varied demographics.

Paul E. Peterson and Eric Hanushek, authors of *Endangering Prosperity: A Global View of the American School* (Brookings, 2013), agree. "The bitter reality is that American students' performance on international math, science, and

People

Kristin Briney was named Data Services Librarian, University of Wisconsin Libraries, Milwaukee. She was formerly Research Assistant at the university's Madison campus.

Diana Brown retired as Director of the St. Charles Public Library, IL. She had been in the position for 35 years.

Dottie Brunette is retiring as Librarian, Fontana Regional Library, Bryson City, NC. She has been with the library for 17 years.

Sandra Collins was appointed Director of the New Castle Public Library, PA, following the retirement of **Susan Walls**. Collins previously served in the same role at Northland Public Library, Pittsburgh.

Michelle La Voie was named Director of the David A. Howe Public Library, Wellsville, NY.

She previously held the same title at the Anderson-Lee Library, Silver Creek, NY.

Jessica Lee was named Assistant Professor of Library Science and Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian at the Odum Library, Valdosta State University, GA.

Janet Stone is now Director, Glendora Public Library, CA, following the retirement of **Rob-in Weed-Brown**. Stone was previously Senior Librarian for Adult Services for the library.

The Huntley Area Public Library, IL, has named **Rosie Lukas**, current Public Services Director, and **Elizabeth Steffensen**, current Director, Information Services, as its two Interim Directors following the departure of **Patrick McDonald**.

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reading tests is still subpar,” said Peterson. “This embarrassing performance, unchanged even as politicians and citizens profess a keen interest in improving our schools, bodes poorly for the future economic security of the United States.”

Yet Diane Ravitch, education historian, education policy analyst, and author most recently of *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (Random, 2013), holds the opposite view. She stressed on her blog that the use of the words *stagnant*, *lagging*, and *flat* to describe U.S. students is “wrong, wrong, wrong.”

MISSING THE MARK

In fact, Ravitch points out that the United States has never ranked near the top on international tests; that research shows no link between test scores and wealth; that U.S. citizens show more ambition and drive than individuals in other countries; and that dire predictions of a failing nation have not been borne out: the United States remains a leader in the world economy, with a productive workforce.

One of Ravitch’s key points is that the PISA findings show that the last dozen years of U.S. public education policy, particularly No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, are “manifest failures” at raising test scores despite billions invested in those initiatives.

McGraw-Hill Discounts Ebooks for Libraries

McGraw-Hill Professional, a division of McGraw-Hill Education, and vendor OverDrive announced December 5 that the publisher’s professional ebook catalog is now available for K–12 school libraries and public libraries worldwide. The catalog includes more than 5,000 business,

The **Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History** received a \$1 million grant from the **Arcadia Fund**. The money will launch a project to digitize endangered-language materials currently housed in the museum’s National Anthropological Archives.

Backstage Library Works completed a conversion project with the newly opened **Library of Birmingham**, England, replacing the Central Library. Backstage worked on the digitization of card catalogs and the implementation of the radio-frequency identification (RFID) process.

The **National Archives and Records Administration** opened 26 additional boxes from the **Robert F. Kennedy Papers**, located at the **John F. Kennedy Presidential Library**, Boston. The boxes contain roughly 7,500 pages from RFK’s years as Attorney General and are available in the library’s Research Room.

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consumer, education, technical, and medical titles. To celebrate the venture, more than 700 of McGraw-Hill’s 2012 and 2013 offerings will be offered at special bundled rates and packages to OverDrive’s school and public library partners through the end of 2013.

“McGraw-Hill Professional is committed to supporting libraries and making our world-renowned content easily available to patrons in multiple formats,” said Philip Ruppel, president of McGraw-Hill Professional, in the announcement. “We are very pleased to work with OverDrive to help us reach students, professionals, and those seeking to advance their education or careers.”

Through OverDrive, K–12 school libraries and public libraries will be able to offer 24/7 access to digital ti-

On December 7, the **San Antonio Public Library** hosted the **Library Champion Awards**, which recognize those who have contributed to the enhancement of library services in the area. The library Board of Trustees first began the awards in 1996.

The **University of Georgia’s Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, Athens**, received a grant from the **National Historical Publications and Records Commission**. The money will fund a one-year project to process the records of Georgia’s Republican and Democratic parties.

Publisher **McGraw-Hill Professional** released its ebook catalog to libraries worldwide. The collection includes more than 5,000 titles on careers, reference, IT, and certification.

The **University of Massachusetts Libraries, Amherst**, became the latest institution to partner with **HathiTrust**, giving the library access to more than 3.5 million public domain books.

titles on virtually any device with a modern browser, including iPhone, iPad, NOOK, Android phones and tablets, and Kindle (U.S. only) through OverDrive Read or OverDrive Media Console.

The titles are available in four broad categories: business/consumer, science/technical, test prep/education, and medical. The selections include “5 Steps to a 5 AP” (test prep series), “Practice Makes Perfect” (foreign-language study), “Schaum’s Outline” (study aid series), and “Mike Meyers’ CompTIA” (technical certification series).

“McGraw-Hill Professional titles represent the best of breed in every business and technical category of publishing,” said Karen Estrovich, manager of collection development at OverDrive, in the announcement.



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