Back to the Future...Where everything Old is New again

So let me explain the tag line for this year. It truly was a year of making the library new again in so many aspects. To begin, it was my first complete year at the helm for the second time. Old director is new once again! Secondly, there were many significant changes in our facility. First, we all are aware of the Reading Room project; making the old children's room new again. The transformation into a quiet space took longer than anticipated but the results are well-worth the wait. And then in October 2015, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the addition to the library and when we re-carpeted this space in February 2016, we made it new once more. And the fun didn't stop there. In late winter we demolished the old house next door at 85 Main Street to make way for our new parking lot. Then we received a generous grant of $10,000 from the Osterman Family Foundation to take the old space where the magazines were once housed and make a new area dedicated to our 'tween and teen patrons. In May 2016, residents voted to grant us $45,000 from the Community Preservation Committee to repair and restore our very old, 1882, water-damaged community room. This money will allow us to fix the slate roof and begin work on the interior plaster. When complete this magnificent and well-used room will have new plaster walls that are freshly painted, seemingly making the room new again.

The old art of collection development has certainly evolved into something new. We eliminated our reference section. The pertinent and scholarly information inside of encyclopedias and other giant tomes has moved on-line. Our on-line use of Encyclopedia Britannica has skyrocketed. If we purchase an expensive set of encyclopedias it would be outdated as soon as it hit the shelf. On-line resources are updated and remain relevant on a daily basis. Also, by deleting or moving select items to regular, circulating non-fiction, we freed up valuable shelf space for our new teen area. Another new innovation for libraries is to circulate non-traditional items to best suit the needs of our communities. This summer we have added outdoor games and a wide assortment of cake pans to our collection and the response has been extremely positive. This trend will only continue to grow. Other new acquisitions include many new databases for education, culture and entertainment; Launchpads which are tablets pre-loaded with thematic apps for all ages - from Dr. Seuss, and STEM learning for children to brain games, astrology and languages for adults; and finally EventKeeper and TixKeeper, on-line software that allows patrons to register and share our events and reserve a museum pass. Patrons have been asking for the feature for a while and we finally found an easy and accountable way of doing those reserves.

And what about those few old hours we had been working with for too many years? We added new hours! We expanded Tuesdays from 2pm until 8pm to now reflect 10am until 8pm and instead of closing on Saturdays in the summer, we have remained open from 10am-2pm throughout the year. Also, we were able to add 3 more hours for a total of 6 hours per week for our archivist, Christina Gilligan. This is still far too few hours for the local history and genealogy questions we receive but we are working on that one hour a time. We also had a few staff changes this past year. Please welcome Tegan Mannino, Circulation Supervisor; and Megan Nolan, Library Technician, to our staff. Many thanks go the Town Finance Committee and Town Administrator, Evan Brassard, for understanding the importance of library funding and working
with us to get ever closer to our state-mandated Municipal Appropriated Requirement. And thanks to the residents that voted on our budget. Increased funding for the past two years has allowed us to increase hours and staff to best serve our community which in turn has increased our circulation to 48,541 items this year and has allowed us to host 257 programs reaching an audience of 3,455 people in attendance.

Then there's some things that remain the same and we never want to change...our support system. The MFL is lucky to have YOU, an association of 36 people interested in the welfare and growth of our library; a dedicated Friends of the Library group that supports our programs and museum passes through a variety of fundraising efforts; committed volunteers that have been with us for years assisting wherever and whenever needed, and community partners, whether local businesses or community organizations, that do just that...partner with us on so many levels, from Monson Schools, Parks and Recreation, MPact, Lions Club, Monson Savings, Adams, and list goes on. This year we really called on our corporation for assistance and you stepped up in a big way. Many thanks are owed to two new corporators, Mike Tassinari and Sean Gouvin. Mike has donated much time and labor to the construction of our new Reading Room and Sean has been essential in helping secure the CPA funding for the restoration of the community room. Their expertise has helped to improve our library and make my job much easier! Also, a very special and well-deserved shout out to Barbara Beaulieu, a corporator, Friend and weekly volunteer that has earned the honor of Monson’s Citizen of the Year for this year. She is an amazing woman giving her time and talents to so many organizations in this town. Thank you Barbara for making the library and Monson a better place.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not mention my mentor and friend, Virginia Midyette who believed in libraries and donated her time and talents insuring this library would thrive. Virginia was co-chair of the fundraising committee to build the wing, raising over $1,200,000 for this project. She was involved in the library since the 1960’s as a corporator, Friend, volunteer, artist, cook and a true renaissance woman. Ginny passed away this year leaving a most generous bequest to the library she loved and built. Not a day goes by that I don’t think of her, whether it’s wanting to share a story, wishing I could sit with her one more time at her kitchen table, or wonder if she would approve of the outfit I was wearing. She knew I always referred to her as Jackie O. because she was the classiest and most well-dressed person I’ve ever met. She is greatly missed but her memory and spirit continue. Thank you Ginny. And thank you to her nieces, Martha Sullivan and Annie Waskom for donating Ginny’s extensive portfolio of paintings to the library. She will beautify the community for years to come!

Respectfully submitted,

Hope Bodwell
(Luckiest) Library Director, Monson Free Library