



ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Because Libraries Matter

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Press Release

The 2018 Illinois Library Association Intellectual Freedom Award is awarded to the O'Fallon Public Library. The award, presented by the ILA Intellectual Freedom Committee, recognizes an individual or group for outstanding contributions in defending intellectual freedom or the advancement of these principles. The award is sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Fund established in 2017 in honor of Robert P. Doyle.

The past few years have seen empiricism, objectivity, and the fundamental freedoms of speech and the press—guaranteed under the Constitution—increasingly under attack and subject to eroding support. Libraries, dedicated as they are to information literacy, lifelong learning, civic engagement and the freedom to read, are positioned perfectly to serve as guides through the wilderness of “fake news” and misinformation, while continuing to promote these same positive values for all patrons. This year the ILA Intellectual Freedom Committee is pleased to honor an entire library—and by extension the community—for standing in defense of this mission.

Earlier this year, upon learning about an upcoming children’s program at O’Fallon Public Library, two citizens went to a city council meeting and made public their opinion regarding what they considered an inappropriate use of tax dollars by the library. The program in question was **Justice Makes a Difference: Social Justice for Kids**, featuring a reading of *Justice Makes a Difference*, a well-respected and popular children’s book by Dr. Artika Tyner. The March 24, 2018 program facilitated by Annetta Works-Salley went on as planned and was attended by a diverse group of children and their parents, despite email protests. The remarks at the city council meeting, followed by an article in the *Belleville News Democrat*, led to some uncomfortable days for the staff of the O’Fallon Library. The objectors wanted the City Council to evaluate everything from the Library’s meeting room policy, “poor decision making by library staff,” the

“library as a platform for social indoctrination,” and the “total inappropriateness of a program that should cater to an entire community, not just fractions within.”

Support for the library and the program poured in from the community. The library received letters, flowers and words of encouragement. Over 200 teachers went to a school board meeting in a show of support to emphasize that these attitudes did not represent the sentiments of the entire community. People showed up to read the book themselves and some got new library cards! People started to notice the library in a different way, and it became more than a place for books, programs, and a place to hang out—by standing its ground and defending the freedom to read, it had become a place of togetherness.

The Intellectual Freedom Award will be presented at the Awards Luncheon to be held on Tuesday, October 9, during the 2018 Illinois Library Association Annual Conference in Peoria. The luncheon starts at 12:00 noon.

For further information, contact the Illinois Library Association.

For Immediate Release