



ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Illinois Library Association

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**Jessica Smith Selected as 2025 Recipient of the Illinois Library Association
Youth Services Librarian of the Year Award**

The Illinois Library Association (ILA) Youth Services Forum presents this year's Youth Services Librarian of the Year Award to Jessica Smith, Children's Services Manager at the Woodridge Public Library. This annual award is presented by the ILA Youth Services Forum and Libraria to a librarian serving in the state of Illinois who has made an outstanding contribution in library service to young people. Since its inception in 1971, the award has been presented to individuals who exemplify resourcefulness, professionalism, and caring in their service to young people.

Jessica Smith began working at her local community college library in California as a student worker in 2006. After learning about all the possibilities in the library field, she worked her way up from a student worker to a library technician II, before applying to the MILS program at San Jose State. After completing her degree, she moved to Illinois and worked as an adult services librarian at a local Illinois public library. She never thought of being a youth services librarian until her manager suggested it, and soon after, she switched departments and found her real passion as a youth services librarian. She has been working in youth services for over 7 years and finds the ability to inspire, create, and make things come to life for children to be a wonderful and fulfilling experience; she can't imagine doing anything else.

Woven into Smith's leadership is her mentorship and training of library associates and librarians across the Woodridge Public Library. Under her leadership, library staff test, vary, and alter programming topics and concepts, which begins during the hiring process and is woven into the daily workflow of the Children's Services department. From early literacy programs such as Building Blocks and the Preschool Play and Learn to trendy kid-centered and fun programs such as Unicorn Parties, Tween Octopus Tag, Spy for a Day, Croc Charm Crafts, Glow Art Week, and Dinos Vs. Dragons, Smith has the advancement of education and fun for the community in mind.

She also takes the lead on family programming, such as the Not-so-Scary-Haunted-House, which is so successful that the library must strategize to manage the demand. Her programming involvement also includes full-scale library programs tied to pop culture and literary characters spread across the library and out of the building into the town plaza. Smith says "yes" and shares her materials, tips, guides, and advice with every parent, teacher, or organization that reaches out for help in recreating the magical moments Smith's programs generate.

The Village of Woodridge strives to encourage neighbor-to-neighbor engagement and to connect residents with the services and programs available to support them, and Smith's work helps fulfill that mission. Smith initiated and organized Stories in the Park, a community partnership with the Woodridge Park District, which brought more than 700 participants over the past two years and has become a beloved seasonal tradition.

Her creativity and attention to detail are also on display at events like the Woodridge Jubilee, where the library's booth has become a favorite stop for both new and long-time residents. With engaging themes, interactive games, and over-the-top décor, Smith ensures that the library's presence is both fun and memorable.

Jessica Smith's continued dedication to her library and community, as well as the outstanding additions she has made to her library, are why the ILA Youth Services Forum believes that she is the best choice for this year's award. Congratulations to Jessica Smith, the 2025 recipient of the ILA Youth Services Librarian of the Year Award!

The Illinois Library Association Youth Services Achievement Award will be presented at an awards ceremony during the 2025 Illinois Library Association Annual Conference. The conference will take place October 14-16, 2025, in Rosemont, Illinois.

For more information, contact the Illinois Library Association.

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About the Illinois Library Association

The Illinois Library Association (ILA) is a professional membership organization that represents Illinois libraries and the millions who depend on them. Founded in 1896, it is the third-largest state library association and serves as a chapter within the American Library Association. ILA is comprised of 2,000 personal and more than 500 institutional members, made up of public, academic, school, and special libraries, as well as librarians, library staff, trustees, students, and library vendors.