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LEAVING A LEGACY

Lake Forest Library director to retire after 28 years, Page 3

Kaye Grabbe, the administrative librarian at the Lake Forest Library, poses outside the library, which she will have directed for 28 years when she retires in April. NICKI KOETTING/22ND CENTURY MEDIA



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News COVER STORY

Longtime Lake Forest librarian reflects on career

NICKI KOETTING, Editor

If it weren't for a serendipitous interaction with a library director, the Lake Forest Library's head librarian for the past 27 years, Kaye Grabbe, might never have joined the profession.

Grabbe — who grew up in the Chicago area and now lives in Palatine — was living in Virginia and working as a substitute English and social studies teacher decades ago when she responded to an ad in the newspaper for a librarian job at the local community college.

"I thought, I could do that. So I called and I don't know whether they asked me the right questions, but they gave me an interview," Grabbe said. "Of course, I didn't have a master's in library sciences. I must've hit the director on a slow day. Instead of him just saying, 'Thanks kid, here's the door, you don't have the basic educational requirements [for the job],' he said, 'This is what we do here.' He spent 45 minutes with me."

After Grabbe spent time learning about the world of libraries with that library director, she was convinced to join the profession. She loved literature and her job as a teacher, and planned to complete a master's degree in library sciences and become a school librarian.

Grabbe did receive her master's degree in library sciences from Dominican University, and did end up running a high school library in St. Louis, but then her career changed. Her husband's job moved their family to suburban Detroit, where Grabbe wasn't able to find a job in a school library. So she "stumbled

"After I was here for a couple of years, I realized that I had never experienced the kind of community support I found here in the [Lake Forest Library]. There was a passion here for the library and that had never been my experience anywhere else."

Kaye Grabbe — Lake Forest Library director on why she has loved working at the library for 27 years

into public library work," she said.

After spending 14 years in the Detroit area working for six libraries — three of those as the director — Grabbe and her family moved back to the Chicago area.

Grabbe applied to the head librarian position at the Lake Forest Library, and, of course, got the job. She recently reviewed her notes from when she visited the library a week before the job interview.

"I came a week before the interview, like a regular patron. I walked around and took notes. I [wrote], 'I'll stay for a couple of years, because it looked dull and boring,'" Grabbe said, laughing. "I came on a Friday afternoon. It was really quiet. [I wrote that] the children's library looked pretty shabby, and it was."

It's been 27 years since Grabbe first walked around the Lake Forest Library, and in her tenure as the head librarian, she's overseen every change that has come to it. Those changes are almost innumerable — from the

complete overhaul of the children's library and renovations in every part of the building to the new media lab and adapting to the digitization of books and services, Grabbe has seen it all.

"It's a question of adapting and keeping up with what people want," she said. "A lot of that is not so much what I've done, but what the staff have done, particularly department heads. They know about the changes and recommend the direction we take. We have wonderful staff [here], and we have enough staff to offer good services."

The new children's library is Grabbe's magnum opus. It was partially renovated in the '90s, a new activity room was created for it out of an outdoor courtyard at the library in 2000, and the entire children's section was gutted in 2005-2006, Grabbe said.

"It's wonderful," she said. "It's probably our best service. Parents here understand and know how important that early childhood experience is — the exposure to reading and literacy. We



Lake Forest Library head librarian Kaye Grabbe is pictured sitting at her desk in her office. Grabbe will retire from the library after 28 years of service in April 2016. NICKI KOETTING/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

just try to keep up with what they want.

"One of our former mayors, Howard Kerr, once said that the library was the jewel in the crown of Lake Forest. Children's services is the jewel in the crown of the library. Kids love it. It's a remarkable space."

After 28 years serving the Lake Forest community through its "crown jewel," Grabbe will retire from her position in April 2016, citing a need to spend more time with her grandchildren. Although she has some time left until she officially leaves the Lake Forest Library, Grabbe is already thinking about what retirement will mean for her — taking into account

both the good and the bittersweet. She's planning on traveling more, taking a few courses, and spending time in Chicago (she and her husband bought a condo in the city a few years ago) and with family.

But, she said, "It's going to be hard to not be in a library every day. I love what I do here."

Grabbe said that it's a testament to the Lake Forest community and her staff that the Lake Forest Library has been so successful.

"After I was here for a couple of years, I realized that I had never experienced the kind of community support I found here in the [Lake Forest Library]," she said. "There was a pas-

sion here for the library and that had never been my experience anywhere else. Eighty percent of the residents have [library] cards here. Instead of spending a lot of time marketing, and getting people to come [to the library], we spend time on services."

And Grabbe's job, for the past 27 years, has been to keep it that way. When asked what she wants her legacy to be when she leaves, she said, "I would say keeping a beautiful, historic building with wonderful services still important to the community in the 21st century, with an emphasis on children's services. That's really important in Lake Forest, it really is."