

PLACES AN MLS CAN TAKE YOU

CREDENTIALLED LIBRARIANS HAVE A TICKET TO RIDE ALMOST ANYWHERE
IN TODAY'S INFORMATION-DRIVEN JOB MARKET

By *Linda K. Wallace*

Freedom and flexibility aren't words most people outside the profession associate with being a librarian. But in today's information-driven society, a growing number of librarians are discovering that their information smarts give them more choices than ever before.

The 11 librarians featured here credit their master's degrees in library and information science with helping them find work they love in ways and places that even they might not have expected.

Whether running a city, managing a business, or designing a digital library, they say their knowledge and skills are easily adapted and highly valued. For some, "perks" such as attending the Academy Awards, meeting world leaders, and visiting faraway places add to the allure.

Most important, they say, is combining their skills and interests with work they enjoy and believe in.

Showcasing the opportunities they offer may go a long way in recruitment and retention of a new generation of librarians.

Meet. . .

LINDA FEIST
Information Specialist to
Gov. Jesse Ventura
St. Paul, Minnesota

The sign on her desk reads "Answerist." Her business card reads "Information Specialist." But Linda Feist says, "I always call myself a librarian. I take a lot of pride in that."

Believed to be the first librarian on a governor's staff, Feist does more than answer questions and do research. She has developed a public-records management plan, a document management system, and a system for meta-tagging Minnesota documents to make them easier to find. She is also helping to redesign the state's Web portal and serves on several statewide committees.



"When the governor won, it was a breath of fresh air. I came down one Saturday, and actually barged in and left my resume. I thought I could be helpful."

The governor's chief of staff thought so too.

It may not be as glamorous as *The West Wing*, but working for a high-profile governor like Ventura has its perks. She gets occasional questions from the governor and has encountered VIPs ranging from the Dalai Lama to Sen. John McCain. "My sister says I'll never have to worry about what to talk about at a cocktail party."

After earning an MLS at the University of Chicago, Feist worked at the Minneapolis Public Library and the University of Minnesota before serving as director of the state's Legislative Reference Service for 10 years. She also operated her own information service.

"It's a great career," says Feist. "Look at the things I'm doing because I know how to find answers and how to help people look for things."

LIZ RODRIGUEZ MILLER
Assistant City Manager for
Neighborhood Services
Tucson, Arizona

The police chief, fire chief, parks director, and public defender report to her.

As assistant city manager for Tucson, Liz Rodriguez Miller supervises 10 city departments and offices, including the library, with some 3,400 employees.

Named assistant city manager in 1996, Miller previously served as director and deputy director of the Tucson-Pima Public Library. It wasn't a difficult transition, says Miller.

"The way I ap-



proached my job as library director is that, not only was I a library professional, I was a professional city administrator working in partnership with other city departments,” explains Miller. “The city manager asked me to continue doing that at the next level.”

A native of Tucson, Miller received her bachelor’s and MLS degrees from the University of Arizona. “I always knew in my heart that I would be in a public-service profession,” she explains. “That was what was appealing about the library profession.”

Her first library job, in her home neighborhood of South Tucson, focused on outreach to Spanish-speaking residents. She also served a brief stint as deputy executive director of ALA’s Library Administration and Management Association in 1990.

Miller says her MLS has served her well.

“The analytical perspective, the approach that there’s always some place to go for information, to assess different points of view. It’s a great perspective.”

A seasoned city official, Miller still looks forward to work each day.

“We’re sort of the switching station for community information and action. There’s always something new and different—sometimes bad but mostly good, positive stuff.”

NANCY FIRCHOW
Associate Product
Manager, eBay
San Jose, California



Surrounded by the Internet boom, Nancy Firchow, a former

hospital librarian in Silicon Valley, says she was inspired by the chaos around her to seek employment with an Internet company.

“It took quite a bit of packaging to make nonlibrary folks recognize that library skills can be sliced and diced and used in many ways outside books and online searches,” Firchow recalls.

She was hired first by PriceRadar, where her work—organizing and classifying products by categories—was simi-

lar to what she now does for eBay. In fact, eBay was quick to hire her after its neighbor closed in March 2000.

Of her new position, Firchow says, “It’s a hoot—an adventure. You look at the world in a whole different way. I’ll see someone wearing pink sequined shoes and think, ‘Do we have a category for that?’”

The first librarian hired by eBay, Firchow says she brings a broader knowledge of classification, search techniques, and Web resources to the firm. As for perks, she says “Some people think what I do is a perk. I’m sanctioned to look at eBay all day long.”

After graduating from the University of California/Davis, Firchow held a series of what she characterizes as “low-end” jobs before earning her MLS at San Jose State University.

Looking back, she concludes, “Getting a library degree is the best move I ever made. It opens up so many avenues. If you’re interested in movies or food or almost anything, it’s the perfect chance to marry something you’re passionate about with a career as a librarian.”

PAMELA CASH MENZIES
Librarian
Johnson Publishing Company
Chicago



Asked if she ever imagined that she would be working for the nation’s premier publisher for African Americans, Pamela Cash Menzies replies, “I feel I was destined to work here.”

Menzies credits her library school education, coupled with participating in a unique Black Studies Librarianship Institute at Fisk University, for landing her in a position where she meets national and international figures such as former Presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, South African President Thabo Mbeki, and entertainer Stevie Wonder.

Menzies knew at an early age that she wanted to be a librarian and applied for a summer job at Johnson while in high school. A few years later, armed with an MLS from the University of Illinois/Urbana-Champaign, Menzies was hired by Johnson as the librarian.

Her responsibilities include working with editors to identify story ideas as well as fact-checking and researching for writers.

“There have been black scientists at NASA who are mentioned but not identified as African American,” Menzies explains. “*Ebony* and *Jet* bring that to the forefront to make sure they’re not overlooked.”

She and her staff of two assistants are also called on to do research for Johnson’s Fashion Fair Cosmetics, as well as company executives.

Memorable assignments include assisting company

founder John H. Johnson in researching his autobiography, as well as contributing to *Ebony's* June 2001 list of the "100 Best Songs by Black Composers," a task complicated by the fact that many of the songs were credited to others.

"They say if you love your job, you never work a day in your life. I'm one of those people," says Menzies.

GREGORY WALSH

Librarian

Academy of Motion Picture Arts
and Sciences

Los Angeles



Yes, he gets to go to the Academy Awards. That's the answer to the question Gregory Walsh usually gets asked first. The answer to the second is:

"What got me the job was an internship I had processing a collection of personal papers that included many screenplays. The academy's library needed a person to handle their script collection and I was their man."

That was seven years ago. Walsh's work puts him in touch with directors, writers, and producers from around the world. Among his prized acquisitions: *Deconstructing Harry* and *Mighty Aphrodite*—both nominees for best screenplay. He also staffs the academy's reference line, where he says the questions range "from simple to difficult, obscure to downright odd" and the caller may be a household name.

"The bottom line is, I provide access to information," says Walsh. "Whether it's a catalog from the 1964 Cannes Film Festival, the cutting continuity script of *From Here to Eternity*, or the proper spelling of Russell Crowe's last name."

The academy's library has a staff of 50 people, 10 of whom have an MLS. A native of Southern California, Walsh was inspired to become a librarian while working in the Government Documents Department at UCLA. He holds a master's in art history from the University of California/Riverside, and an MLS from UCLA.

"Two things I love about my career," says Walsh. "One, the idea of helping somebody get the exact piece of information they need; and two, the incredible people I get to work with. Not to be too Pollyannaish, but there's nothing about my job that I don't like."

SNOW ZHU

Digital Librarian

Anti-Defamation League
New York City



Snow Zhu has a vision—a vision that will transform the hard copies and document collections at the national

Anti-Defamation League (ADL) into a state-of-the-art research information center accessible online to staff and researchers around the world.

"We have a lot of valuable sources in our library and we are working to put these things online and to make them more available," Zhu explains. "ADL has a long history fighting anti-Semitism, bigotry, and extremism. We have many educational publications and some of them are free. I want to bring this information to the public."

Zhu describes her job as a combination of traditional library manager and project manager. Working closely with the ADL's Information Technology Department, she and a staff of 12 are responsible for design and implementation of the digital library within the next three years.

A native of China, Zhu came to the U.S. on a scholarship to study English literature at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. She decided not to return to China following the massacre in Tiananmen Square. After receiving an MLS from Rutgers in 1991, she worked for public and college libraries and Legal Services of New Jersey before joining ADL almost two years ago.

Working at the Anti-Defamation League has fulfilled a lifelong goal, says Zhu. "I feel I'm needed and can develop my potential. ADL makes a great contribution to the world. I can use my skills and knowledge to help people. I feel very happy."

KATHRYN ZAHAREK

Librarian

The Freedom Forum
Washington, D.C.



Whether researching an exhibit or helping a journalist on deadline, Kathryn Zaharek finds her behind-the-scenes view of journalism an intriguing one.

Much of her work focuses on the Newseum, an interactive museum funded by the Freedom Forum to show the news process at work through exhibits, programs, and broadcasts featuring journalists and newsmakers from around the world.

"I love my job," says Zaharek. "The questions we get are so diverse, anything from ready reference to primary research. It's fast-paced and detail-oriented."

An exhibit titled “War Stories” had Zaharek researching how the term “war correspondent” originated. Other assignments have included collecting newspapers from around the world with coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks, researching and locating artifacts, finding experts to confirm facts, and preparing research packets.

In addition to meeting such distinguished visitors as journalist Peter Arnett and the king of Cameroon, Zaharek says “one of the perks is that every day you’re helping to support First Amendment issues and advance the Freedom Forum’s goals of a free press, free speech, and free spirit for all people.”

On the job since March 2001, Zaharek worked briefly at a public library after receiving an MLS in 2000 from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She also holds a bachelor’s in history and anthropology from the University of Connecticut/Storrs. Her library experience includes an internship at Old Sturbridge Village and stints at the Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery of Art while pursuing her MLS.

“I’ve been able to apply everything I learned in library school—the organizational skills, cataloging, reference, and technology,” says Zaharek. “The core of what you learn can be applied to pretty much anything. It’s a very practical degree and a very valuable one.”

MICHAEL GRECO
Project Manager
Zimmerman Associates
Washington, D.C.

At the age of 28, Michael Greco has what many would consider an enviable assignment: managing the digitization of a national treasure—namely, the historical collection of the U.S. Mint.

He sees his challenge as the creation of an archive that is both a physical and a state-of-the-art digital archive. Besides Greco, the project employs an archivist and three scanning operators who work with the U.S. Mint’s historian and staff to process, catalog, and digitize some 600,000 documents, including annual reports, ledgers, glass-plate negatives, photographs, coins, medals, and other artifacts dating from the early days of the nation.

“We’re scanning everything from the re-



ally interesting stuff down to the day-to-day correspondence. It’s sort of the ideal for the future of archives,” says Greco.

His employer, Zimmerman Associates, provides information management, engineering, research, and development services on a contract basis to federal and other agencies.

Along with a love of history, Greco brings to the job an MLS with a technology focus from the University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill and a master’s in public history with a concentration in archives from North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

A 2000 graduate of NCSU, Greco said he was surprised at the outcome of a job search conducted after his wife found a job in the nation’s capital. He looks forward to new assignments when his current project ends.

“There are a lot of exciting things going on,” Greco adds. “Digitization is one aspect. There’s also a lot going on with the issue of providing access to a greater population. I like that it’s new and there are still questions. I like being part of it.”

LORIENE ROY
Professor
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Texas/Austin

Where native language lives, there lives culture. That belief led Loriene Roy to found “If I Can Read, I Can Do Anything,” a project that promotes literacy skills and cultural identity among Native American children. Her work has taken her to Aotearoa/New Zealand and Sweden, where librarians are working with indigenous populations.

Roy began “If I Can Read” after visiting reservation schools in connection with a federal grant program to promote use of technology to preserve native culture. She discovered that school libraries were largely left out because of a Catch-22: limited resources and staffing. “I hated seeing children grow up without knowing a library,” Roy recalls.

“If I Can Read” was launched in 1999 with grants from the ALA and the U.S. Department of Education. It continues to be supported by grants and gifts from the American Indian Library Association, libraries, publishers, and others. Thanks to the project, 4,000 children are enrolled at 10 schools on or near reservations in 12 states, and libraries play a highly visible role.

A member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (Anishinabe, Pembina Band), Roy became a librarian after working as a medical radiology technologist. She received an MLS from the University of Arizona and a doctorate from the Univer-



sity of Illinois before joining the University of Texas library school faculty 14 years ago.

Roy finds her work culturally, socially, and spiritually enriching. "Each day I am challenged to make decisions that impact my life and those of others," says Roy. "I believe our field offers the opportunity to become fulfilled. We learn about ourselves while serving others."

WIL HAWK

Director of Information Resources
and Associate Director,
Literacy Information and Communication System
National Institute for Literacy
Washington, D.C.

Wil (William) Hawk always thought he would be a professor or work in the ministry helping people find their own answers. Library service won out, he says, "because it seemed like the best balance between technology, information resources, and the people stuff."

Today, he is one of three librarians employed by the National Institute for Literacy, a federal institution that supports research, education, and training directed at the more than 40 million Americans who are functionally illiterate.

Hawk became interested in librarianship while working as a literacy volunteer, an experience that changed his life.

"I grew up being very bookwormish and standoffish," Hawk explains. "Through work as a literacy volunteer, I realized I could both help and connect with people. Librarians are intrinsic to the work of literacy providers."

He received his MLS in 1998 at age 28 from the University of Tennessee/Knoxville. While attending library school, he received a research assistantship to work as a librarian at the Center for Literacy Studies. After graduation, he continued to work there full-time before joining the National Institute for Literacy.

Hawk spends much of his time developing and maintaining NIL's Web site, including a database for grants and funding and another for research and curriculum resources. His responsibilities include training others in how to use the institute's digitized resources, monitoring grants and contracts, collecting literacy statistics, and answering reference questions.

"I identify myself as a librarian although I'm not sure that's how others see me," explains Hawk. "I'm often labeled as a tech guy, but I do a lot of different things. Whether you're a classic librarian or not, the skills are vital in almost every environment."

ANNETTE MATHIAS

President
Facts for Fiction
Portland, Oregon

Describe the woman from New York Society who lived with Sitting Bull in 1890. Tell me everything there is to know about marketing potties for toddlers. How was kidney disease treated in 1959?

Annette Mathias, a.k.a. "The Answer Lady," begins her day at 7 a.m. by checking to see what the "questions of the day" will be. Her clients: writers of mysteries, romance, screenplays, and other fictional matter grounded in fact.

These days Mathias's work is conducted almost entirely over the Internet with customers logging onto her company's Web site at www.factsforfiction.com. While Mathias specializes in online searching for answers, she also has assistants who research print materials at libraries.

Mathias got her MLS at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland after the School of Architecture closed. ("I had to quickly pick something else and I knew I really liked to read. . . .") After graduation, she launched her own business, Information Specialists, which catered to businesses in need of research services. Seeking a new challenge, she opened a West Coast branch in Portland. Facts for Fiction was born in 1997 when Mathias decided to change her focus to writers.

Mathias believes there is a place—and need—for librarians in the marketplace but that they must have strong entrepreneurial as well as information skills. "We are a service business and we must please the customer in order to get paid," Mathias notes.

After some 20 years, she still relishes "the excitement of the new question, the challenge of seeing how well we can answer the question and still dazzle the client." ♦

LINDA WALLACE
is cofounder of
the consultancy
Library Com-
munications
Strategies
in Chicago.

