

Bisbee's Copper Queen Library Annex celebrates five years on Thursday

By Leah Mueller Special to the Herald/Review
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Library Services Coordinator Alison Williams

BISBEE — The Copper Queen Library is one of Bisbee's many treasures. Located inside a massive stone structure above the post office, the library sports two stories, enormous balconies, tall windows, and a long, steep stairwell.

After you climb those stairs, you'll be greeted by the smell of well-loved books. The musty, but pleasant scent can transport you to afternoons spent in other libraries—it's instantly familiar and comforting. The library offers a plethora of titles, comfortable seating, newspapers on spindles, community events, and much more.

Founded in 1882, Arizona's oldest library has served as an important resource for several generations. It began in true Bisbee style. Members of the Copper Queen Mining Company found a swinging corpse in the middle of town and decided that the town needed more sophisticated diversions.



Exterior of the Copper Queen Library in Old Bisbee

In 1885, the building moved from its original site at the Copper Queen Mercantile Store to its present location at 6 Main Street in Old Bisbee. 137 years later, the CQL was named the Best Small Library in America by the Library Journal, due to its innovative cultural offerings.

Library services coordinator Alison Williams has been with the CQL since January, 2016. She works closely with library manager Jason Macoviak. Williams is a force of nature—a cheerful, competent woman who helps to keep the organization running smoothly. She creates ever-expanding programs to enhance the library’s services and make them accessible to a variety of citizens.

Williams started as the Library Program Coordinator, responsible for programming for all age groups. “As program coordinator, we expanded the idea of what a library can offer in the 21st century,” she explained.

“I started the Library of Things, offering sports equipment and wifi hotspots for checkout, among other new programs. Then I was promoted to Library Services Coordinator, encompassing grant writing and other additional responsibilities.”

Williams’ interest in literature spans many years. She received a BA in English Literature and Cultural Anthropology from Hunter College, then won the Nuyorican Poetry Slam in 1993. The popular NYC spoken word event was started by Bob Holman a few years beforehand.

Performers are scored by audience members, chosen at random by the slam coordinator. They rate the poets on a scale of 0-10. The process can be brutal. At the end of it all, one poet emerges victorious and goes home with glory (and a small cash prize).

Williams coordinates the library’s activities during April’s annual poetry month, bringing together local and out-of-town poets for readings and workshops. She has also hosted live poetry readings from the library’s balcony, an event that both startles and delights local passersby.

Williams’ unflagging enthusiasm is evident in everything she does.

“I love being a public servant and serving my community through government,” she said. “I am passionate about every aspect of my job, finding new and innovative ways to provide services and programs, for free, to all. I’m most proud of the creation of the CQL Annex in 2018, in partnership with the BUSD. We found a way to reach this important neighborhood, that is the farthest away from the main library in Old Bisbee.”

The CQL Annex is in the underserved San Jose area near Safeway, at 519 Melody Lane. The neighborhood has been undergoing a sort of renaissance lately, partly due to Williams’ efforts. In addition to books, the library includes a sensory garden for children (though adults are more than welcome). It features five raised planter beds, so people can get ideas of what to plant at home.

On Thursday, December 21, the Annex will end the year with a celebration of its fifth year of operation. This festive solstice event will feature live music by local busker Christa Leigh, a hot cocoa bar, ornament crafting, and other revelry. Drop by the Annex between 6 to 8 p.m. and help support a wonderful community resource.