

GUARDIAN

'Distinguished' librarian recognized

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Gainesville librarian Linda Cue makes a difference in someone's life everyday whether helping patrons of the Alachua County Library District or in the community helping underrepresented people deal with such things as background barriers to employment.

Cue was recently recognized for her work empowering the most vulnerable in the community with information and resources when she received the annual Distinguished Career Award from the Northeast Florida Library Information Network (NEFLIN), a nonprofit training and research organization that serves 550 libraries in 24 counties throughout northeast Florida.

"Linda Cue leads by example through her commitment to patrons and community partnerships," said Shaney T. Livingston, director of the Alachua County Library District. "She has helped make our libraries more inclusive by pioneering innovative programs and services."

Cue has worked for more than 20 years with the district and has focused on supporting and serving patrons, particularly those impacted by the criminal justice system and people struggling to find employment. She has worked in the district's jail library, which is a partnership with the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, and now serves as an adult services librarian at the district's branch in downtown Gainesville that serves as the district's headquarters..

Cue started the Re-Entry Partnership program in 2016 to provide tools and education for job seekers with criminal backgrounds and other barriers to employment. The program has grown to a four-day conference and a job fair in collaboration with child welfare services and community resource provider Partnership for Strong Families.

During her experience working in the jail library, Cue said she realized how important access to information is to patrons who are incarcerated.

“Access to information can be empowering,” said Cue, adding that a lot of the patrons at the jail didn't have high school diplomas and introducing them to literacy programs made a positive difference in their lives.

Cue said the jail librarian has a very important and impactful job by creating such programs as literacy programs, research programs, book clubs and transcription programs in collaboration with the University of Florida Oral History program.

Cue said female patrons at the jail library worked transcribing the oral histories, and had an opportunity to transcribe the A. Quinn Jones oral history. Cue said through the oral history program, participants learn local history, transcription and hone their writing and typing skills.

Cue said she worked in the jail library for four years. The most challenging part of that job was that you work in two systems with different missions, and the work you do is very different to what a “regular” librarian does. She said patrons at the jail can't access the Internet, and the jail library relies on books.

“We worked in small groups doing the same program eight to 10 times a day to accommodate all the patrons wanting to be in a program,” Cue said. “Most of the time working together were the positives. I learned information can be used to change people and empower them. I see information as a step to change their lives.”

Cue, 56, was born and raised in Gainesville. She attended Williams Elementary, Lincoln Middle and Eastside High schools. She worked part-time as a substitute teacher for the Alachua County School District, and also worked part-time for the Library District outreach library, sometimes in the Mobile Library. She ultimately decided to pursue a career in library sciences

She earned an associate of arts degree in English and Women Studies at Santa Fe College, a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Women Studies at the University of Florida and a masters' degree in library and information studies at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

The role of the library has changed, libraries have evolved and there is more room to use your creativity and create programs, Cue said, adding some patrons bring their skills into the library to the benefit of those who work in libraries.

“We have some great librarians and I learn a lot from them,” said Cue.

When asked about programs to highlight African American lives in Gainesville and Alachua County, Cue said she has developed many programs highlighting African American artists' works and lives, including Juneteenth performances and author events.

She collaborated with the late Patricia Hilliard-Nunn in the African American studies program about author Zora Neale Hurston. She worked with fellow librarian, the late Nathaniel Courtney, in the Juneteenth celebration programs at Cone Park that have grown throughout the years into a big event that brings the community together.