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SHE HEADS THE BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA

There's no need to whisper when walking into the Carnegie Library in Union County, S.C. The "shhh" mentality left in 2005.

Laughing teenagers dancing to songs just downloaded to their iPods are common. A better effort to warmly greet patrons while providing a more up-to-date collection also was embraced.

That's part of the reason the library has more visitors. It's also part of the reason it has been named the best small library in America.

The recognition has been celebrated across Union, and the honor has sunk in with some of the youth who fill the library after school.

"It's pretty cool, a little town like Union getting a big award," said Bruce Means, 13.

"Best Small Library in America" is an award sponsored by *Library Journal* and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Union's is the fifth library to receive the award. It was chosen from a field of more than 60 libraries across the country. The library was on the cover of the February issue of *Library Journal*, and it received a \$15,000 prize.

"Union is incredibly dynamic for how much money it operates on," says Rebecca Miller, executive editor of *Library Journal*. "It's a Cinderella story in a way. They've done a lot with what they have. It means the taxpayers are getting a lot of return for their money, but that doesn't mean they don't need more money."

A lot of credit is given to Nancy Rosenwald, the library's director. Rosenwald, a 1976 Furman graduate, took the job in October 2005 after living in Connecticut for 22 years. She saw a picture of the historic library and decided to apply for the job. She said her first priority was to improve customer service.

"There was this attitude of the scary librarian who went 'shhh,'" Rosenwald says. "[I thought] let's get people in to make them feel happy and comfortable."

Cindy Walton, the children's librarian, has worked at the library almost five years, and she's watched the transformation. "The first time I walked in here, I was wondering, 'Why did I get this job?'" Walton says. "It was not very people-friendly. Now it is. It's not just a little change. It's a huge change."

Rosenwald hired teens and accepted teen



Nancy Rosenwald shows off the cover story on Carnegie Library in the *Library Journal*.

volunteers. Some of the eight full-time staff members also have experience working in retail.

Rosenwald says the library's staff started providing more one-on-one help for those using computers. The building also became more kid-friendly. The 104-year-old structure is in a historic district, and she received permission to paint the children's section bright yellow.

Many of her daughter's stuffed animals rest atop bookshelves, and stacks of board games entertain kids spending their after-school hours in the library. Snacks are sometimes available, too.

Union County's population is about 29,000, and Rosenwald says the library has about 13,000 regular patrons.

"We're probably circulating close to 9,000 books a month, which is amazing," she says. "Half of those are kids' books. People say kids aren't reading, but ha! Yes they are. The kids that hang out here are reading like crazy."

Teens also have their own section with three computers, books and places to sit.

Rosenwald says the \$15,000 prize could be used to upgrade the library's phone system, which doesn't have voice mail, and purchasing more computers. The library has 19 computers.

"The more computers we can get, the better," she says.

The adult section of the library, which has seven computers, was added in 1986, and a dirt basement is below it. Rosenwald says the library has an architect's rendering of what that space could look like if completed. It would cost an estimated \$1.5 million.

"Doing a capital campaign is a big step, but we have to look at it," she says.

She adds that the library, which operates mostly on the \$200,000 it gets from the county's property taxes, is bracing to receive less money from the state because of the economic climate.

In March, the library hosted its first golf tournament as a fundraiser to purchase new materials. The flier for the tournament mentioned that it's America's Best Small Library.

The library staff is enjoying the notoriety. "The community is so excited," Rosenwald says. "I kind of feel like a star. I go places and people are like, 'That's the library lady.'"

— DUDLEY BROWN

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