



**Nominee: Sarah Sugden  
Waterville Public Library  
Waterville, Maine**

**Nominator: Tina Chapman**

**1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award.**

Remember that scene from “It’s a Wonderful Life” when the lovable, despondent George Bailey is told by Clarence Odbody what’s happened to his wife Mary without him? She’s become a timid, old-maid librarian! Apparently, this was the worst possible outcome for a woman in the mid-20th century. Not these days! We have Sarah Sugden, the city of Waterville Maine’s public library director, chief advocate and head cheerleader. Sarah is a brilliant, charming, whirling dervish of energy and fun. On behalf of Waterville area leaders and community members, we are delighted to nominate Sarah Sugden for The Carnegie Corporation of New York/New York Times I Love My Librarian Award. Sarah is a superstar who espouses the joys of the Waterville Library in such a quirky and charming way - her enthusiasm is contagious. She is filled with amusing anecdotes about her family, the library, and the City of Waterville, all which are incredibly near and dear to her heart. She’s a comedian and an ambassador; a sweet, genuine, intelligent person who lives and breathes books, words, information and learning. She has impelled an entire community to fall in love with both her and the Waterville Public Library.

**2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and made your experience.**

In preparing for this award application, several Waterville area leaders and community members provided their thoughts and stories about Sarah. Of her many accomplishments and attributes, one element was consistently mentioned across the board – that because of Sarah, the Waterville Library now offers a warm and inviting atmosphere where people from all walks of life are welcome. Longtime library patron and current volunteer Barbara Sweeney moved to the Waterville area about 45 years ago when her children were very young. Soon thereafter, she and her two boys began frequenting the Waterville Public Library. Barbara fondly reminisced about how her kids grew up there, at first going every couple of weeks to utilize the children’s center and later going on their own to do research for their high school projects. Now that her children are adults and she is retired, Barbara volunteers at the library every week. Barbara described how one of the most positive aspects of volunteering at the library was that Sarah maintains such a welcoming attitude to everyone who visits. She has inspired Barbara to think differently

about people who “in other circumstances might be scary” and to treat everyone with the same respect and caring.

Michael Trombley is a former special education teacher who has lived in Waterville for over thirty years. About a year ago after having recently retired, Michael began frequenting the library in order to save money by borrowing books rather than buying them. A former writer of poetry and short stories, Michael noticed one day that the library staff had posted a flyer about National Novel Writing Month. He was intrigued because in the past he had been encouraged by friends and family to write a novel. In support of National Novel Writing Month, Sarah and the library staff had developed a writer’s support group, provided web-based resources and offered a quiet, studious area on the fourth floor. This was the inspiration that Michael needed. The end result was a 90,000 word novel titled “Al”. Al is the story of a 9 year old boy whose family life falls apart after the death of his mother. He continues to struggle as he’s moved to a different town, begins attending a new school and is met with classmates who are not welcoming of him. Then for a Halloween party he dresses as an owl, and something sparks. He begins learning as much as he can about owls and what he loves most is that they are the protectors of the forest. Not long afterward, an unknown superhero – OWL, begins doing good deeds around the neighborhood. His identity however, is a mystery to the community. What a gift that Sarah and the Waterville Public Library have given to Michael, who is now a novelist.

**3. How has the librarian made a difference in the community? Please be specific.**

When Sarah was hired as the City of Waterville’s new library director in January 2005, she was a breath of fresh air for the organization and the community. Considering that the Waterville Library’s building has been around since 1896 that was no small achievement! Sarah's enthusiasm for creating an atmosphere where people of all ages and economic status feel welcome was a dramatic change from the way the library was perceived before her arrival. Sarah has consistently made significant contributions to our community through creating connections, promoting use of the library, and challenging our ideas of what a library can offer to its community.

About six years ago, the Maine Department of Labor closed its Waterville based Career Center. Our community began experiencing a significant gap in services and supports for local job seekers, particularly those who were challenged with a lack of skills, resources and/or transportation, and in some cases, a home and a warm place to be during the day. Sarah began to pursue an idea - that the library could in fact help fulfill this need for the community. A partnership was born which included the library, the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce and our local Community Action Program to address the gap of career services. Serendipitously, Sarah was at that time also leading a major library renovation project. Because of Sarah's due diligence, her innovative thinking, and her ability to gather support from city officials, Library Board members and community stakeholders, in March of 2011, the Waterville Public Library’s Business & Career Center opened. The Waterville community is so proud that our library now provides an array of services for job seekers, career changers, entrepreneurs, and small businesses.

The Business & Career Center at the Waterville Library is potentially life changing for our community members. Due to the rural nature of mid-Maine, which is compounded by the level of poverty in our area (up to 80% of children attending Waterville public schools receive free or reduced lunch), it is critical for community members to be able to access job and career assistance locally. And it's more than just having available computers and internet. In Waterville, the library is the hub of innovative career advancement, skills development and job identification/ procurement. Offerings include classes, one-on-one support, job fairs and resume writing labs for job seekers. Department of Labor staff schedule time at the library on a weekly basis. Rosemary Winslow, Congressional Aide to Congressman and Maine Gubernatorial Candidate Mike Michaud utilizes the library for one of Congressman Michaud's priorities, serving veterans. According to Ms. Winslow, "I have appreciated that, on a regular basis, I can connect with a local Veterans' Employment Representative who spends a day per week assisting veterans who are looking for work. These enhancements within our local library, initiated by Sarah and implemented by her incredible staff, are making a difference for Central Maine".

The library's partnership with the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce has encouraged local employers to see the library as a place to recruit employees. WorkReady, a collaborative program which includes the Waterville Library as one of its primary partners, offers a three-week course which teaches soft skills such as resume writing, interviewing, and appropriate work etiquette to adults who are entering or re-entering the workforce. Local employers volunteer to do mock interviews toward the end of the course and offer the students feedback. Tina Chapman, former President for United Way of Mid-Maine stated that, "the WorkReady collaborative so clearly demonstrates real impact, we could literally see the progression of self-esteem among the participants. When they received their certification, it was a real achievement. Having Sarah and the Waterville Library as part of the leadership team of WorkReady has been integral to its success".

Sarah's interest in promoting public art has sparked connections with Waterville Main Street, which has worked with Sarah and the library on an outdoor mosaic: "Au Courant". Local artists constructed a beautiful piece on a curved outdoor wall of the library integrating the Kennebec River flow with our modern lives, now a showpiece example of our love of creative enterprise. They have also presented the Maine Open Juried Art Show, where 80 artists from 55 communities throughout Maine converge at the Waterville Library each year for an art show that is not only highly respected in artistic circles, but also stays on display throughout the month in a location that is accessible to all.

A sampling of programming at the Waterville Library demonstrates and is inspired by Sarah's passion for learning and her goofy personality. Recent offerings include "Ukuleles at the Library", "Crafternoons - Drop in Crafts for Kids", "Pigs and Noodles Family Story Time" and "Cirque du Geek" – Waterville's first convention of the weird and wonderful. Thanks to Sarah, the Waterville Library is where it's at!

#### **4. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?**

Library patron Eve A. Sotiriou of Greenwood Street in Waterville shared the following about her experiences with Sarah and the Waterville Library.

To whom it may concern:

I wholly and fully provide my nomination for Sarah Sugden for the “I love my librarian” national award!!!! Sarah is a shining bright light within the Waterville Community. The Waterville Library patrons consist of a wonderful diverse group of people that Sarah welcomes each day and greets us all as family. Her warmth and caring is sincere and makes everyone at the library feel like part of her family.

Sarah has been there for me through a difficult journey for both myself and my son. She has been supportive by listening, being present at important events, sending letters of support, offering encouragement, caring, and showing genuine concern. There have been days that I have felt overwhelmed and tired by this journey, but after meeting with Sarah, even for a few minutes, that heaviness is gone and it is replaced with hope once again.

This applies not only to me. I have personally witnessed Sarah making herself accessible to other patrons when they need someone to be there for them during a difficult time in their lives, to talk, to listen, or to let them know that someone cares. Sarah is able to balance her role as the director of the library, yet be compassionate and accessible to the patrons.

The Waterville Library building itself is a tribute to Sarah’s careful thought to detail and consideration towards others. The setup is user friendly and welcoming. There are always wonderful fun activities available, free of charge, to our families.

The Waterville library staff as a whole has been welcoming from the moment my son and I walked into their doors in January of 2011. They are an excellent example of Sarah's careful selections as to how to serve our community best. The staff is comprised of a diverse group of people who all treat each other with love and respect, which is felt and appreciated by the library patrons.

Sarah embraces the saying, "come as you are". Everyone that comes into the library feels respected and treated like family. Sarah is a blessing to our community. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to write this letter on behalf of Sarah Sugden! Sincerely  
Yours, Eve A. Sotiriou.

#### **5. How does the nominee make the library a better place?**

Sarah's leadership manifests in three distinct ways: Vision, History, and Inclusivity. Her vision of what a prosperous, thriving community can be, articulated through her daily work inspires her fellow Waterville area leaders, staff and community members. Sarah's excitement about Waterville's rich history, and interest in preserving the legacy of the local historical society and our Redington Museum keeps our cultural heritage alive. Jen Olsen, Director of Waterville Main Street described some of her favorite library events.

“The Poetry Express: is a new event on which we collaborate with the Colby College Library Special Collections and Maine Poet Laureate Wes McNair. Local poets of all ages and abilities are invited to read their work aloud in a community setting. We also now offer Reading at the Farmers' Market: On Thursday, our local Farmers' Market takes place outside the library in the public parking lot. Each month, volunteers or library staff read aloud to children at market. This has become part of our Farmers' Market regular programming schedule, fostering literacy for all”.

Tom Longstaff, Maine State Representative and former Waterville City Counselor highlighted Sarah's oversight of the Waterville Library's capital campaign and subsequent expansion of the library and the enhancements in the facilities as one of Waterville's recent and best amenities. “Not only does the library have added space but the space is better used and resources are much more easily available to those who use the library (and that number is growing). The energy efficient components of the library's expansion have made this building a model for other projects. Finally, and equally if not more important, Sarah has created an environment where security for children is a high priority and well implemented”.

From July 2009-June 2010, Sarah took on the role of Waterville Rotary Club President. Each week, every Monday at noon for a whole year, she took that opportunity to shine a spotlight on the library. How did that make the library a better place? She impelled the community's leaders to think of the library collectively as our library. During the last couple years, she has provided guidance for the Waterville Rotary Club with their early literacy program called “Rhoda Reads”, which is based on the principle that reading to children at the most opportune time, before age 5, is critical to their brain development. She has also been one of the key community stakeholders involved in a broad-based, multi-organizational early literacy effort called Project 2020. This collective impact effort is guided by the team's mission: to assure that by the year 2020, 100% of Waterville's children will be reading at or above grade level when assessed in 3rd grade.

Dana Hamilton, Employment Services Coordinator with Kennebec Valley Community Action Program described how the library has become a place that serves as a meeting place for important community conversations. According to Waterville Mayor Karen Heck, “when I became mayor, the only place I considered holding my monthly Waterville Creates updates for residents was the library. Since then, I've been to graduations, community meetings, art openings and, of course, to the stacks to check out books. Sarah has made the library someplace everyone includes in their list of Waterville's greatest assets”. Kimberly Lindlof, President/CEO of the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce wholeheartedly agrees. “Sarah has turned our sleepy ole' library into a dynamic, updated community gathering spot where people go to learn, stimulate their children with various activities around literacy”. Michele Prince, Community Services Director of the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program espoused, “I have never experienced a library like this one. It is becoming the heart of the city”.

Sarah Sugden is a visionary, whose passion for learning is only matched by her passion for her hometown, Waterville, Maine. She seeks to keep our historic library relevant to

modern users through interaction, leadership development, outreach, and collaboration. As a community, we are indebted to Sarah for the tremendous and indelible difference she has made for the Waterville community. She inspires all of us in many ways. Sarah's energy and love of the library and our community are entirely infectious. Thank you Sarah - for touching all of us and for making the Library such a vibrant and fabulous part of community life in Waterville.