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# I Love My Librarian!

2008 Award

## **Nomination for Jennifer Lankford Dempsey**

Library Media Specials and Technology Coordinator  
Wrights Mill Road Elementary School  
Auburn, Alabama

### **Nominator:**

Lynda Tremaine  
Auburn, Alabama

### **1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?**

I have known Mrs. Jennifer Dempsey for the past 20 years. I began working with Mrs. Dempsey while she was a university intern and then later as a classroom teacher at my school. She taught 4th grade for seven years and daily demonstrated her love and appreciation of literature in the classroom. When I left my 2nd grade classroom to become the school's principal, our librarian was transferred to a new school. I immediately knew the perfect person to fill the position. Mrs. Dempsey accepted the challenge of becoming our Library Media Specialist. Already holding a Master's degree in Education, Mrs. Dempsey began the time consuming task of taking courses for certification in yet a new area of study. Ten years later, Mrs. Dempsey continues to improve and transform the library into the school's learning center . . . the true HEART of our school.

### **2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one.**

Mrs. Dempsey has truly been the driving force behind our school's transformation into a 21st Century learning community. When she became the librarian, she inherited an antiquated library. There were rows of dark book cases filled with worn out books that were simply

collecting dust. Understanding that a warm welcoming environment would entice children to read, she immediately set into motion the project of renovating the library. With her leadership, enthusiasm, and a lot of elbow grease, she enlisted the help of PTA to secure funding, as well as initiating her own funding projects including Birthday Book Club and "2000 for 2000," where she set a goal of adding 2000 new books to the collection. She has written and received numerous grants from not only our local foundation, but from the State Legislature to transform the library into a bright, colorful learning environment full of the latest editions of fine student literature and the latest in technology. The theme of the space is, "Welcome," and students and adults certainly congregate here to read, research and relax. The Rabren Learning Center (RLC) offers wireless Internet access as well as an interactive white board for student and guest presentations. We were the first elementary school in Auburn to implement lap top computers for student projects, research and circulation. Mrs. Dempsey's forward and creative thinking in designing the space now serves as a model for schools who wish to move from a library concept to a learning center model. One section of the space has even been designed to resemble a cottage front porch – complete with rocking chairs for reading enjoyment. The students know that this is a place where they can be immersed in literature and information. She makes certain that both students and adults in the school and community have a vast assortment of resources including books, magazines, web sites, books on tape, and iPods to name a few. The RLC's website provides a vast resource of appropriate links for parents and students. As principal, I can't even begin to explain all the ways our school benefits by having a media specialist with such varied and valuable talents. Mrs. Dempsey wears many hats in her role as media specialist. She is our librarian, teacher, technician, hostess, counselor, mentor and cheerleaders. Whether student, teacher or community member, she can recommend the title of a great book for you and she can lead you to Web 2.0 tools to enhance your learning. She has taken her job responsibilities to a level that now includes technology coordinator. She provides the staff and faculty with professional learning opportunities in the use of the latest tech tools. Mrs. Dempsey facilitates, "Tech Tuesdays," where teachers are given tips on integrating technology into their daily curriculum. No teacher is required to attend, but all come to hear the latest and greatest with respect to technology and to share with each other. These informal gatherings have proven to infuse our teachers with an excitement and enthusiasm about technology and to promote our "community of learners," philosophy. There is no doubt that due to the strength of our library media program, our students and teachers, as well as I, benefit academically and socially and are becoming competent and successful members of the 21st Century world wide community.

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

Mrs. Dempsey strives to meet each child's unique learning style and utilizes resources including wikis, blogs, new books, websites, podcasts and Voice Threads to make sure each student has the opportunity to reach their potential. Last spring she organized Wrights Mill Road Elementary School's first "Tech-Know Expo." 5th grade students were invited to present an area of technology that they felt they were "expert" in. They tried out to be presenters and they offered courses to 3rd graders, 4th graders and members of the community on topics including Skype, Blabber, advanced Notebook, "How to Use a Stylus," "i-Pod 101," "Making a Calendar to Improve Your Organization Skills," "Stay Safe When You IM," "A Blog is not a Monster," "The Trix of Text," and our most popular offering, "How to Use a Cell Phone and Convince Your Parents to Buy You One." Students were required to prepare a 20 minute presentation for up to 15 members in the audience. The Expo empowered the students to become the teachers and to interact with interested participants of all ages. The idea of teaching interested adults was an exciting one and is further evidence of Mrs. Dempsey's goal of encouraging parents to come to school and be directly involved in their child's learning. Not only does Mrs. Dempsey embrace technology to impact student learning, but she maintains a strong emphasis on collection development as well. Our collection is constantly growing and evolving to meet the challenges of our ever changing world. The latest collection analysis showed that the average age of the contents of the collection was 8 years. One book representative commented that having such a fresh collection is "Unheard of," in an elementary school. Teachers are enticed to view the new books during "Pre-view Parties," where Mrs. Dempsey decorates and provides snacks and goodies for the teachers as they browse the new titles. The teachers then take new books back to their classroom to use with their curriculum. The collection contains a broad range of materials including reference, fiction, nonfiction and periodicals and in an effort to attract reluctant readers and more boys to books, an ever growing collection of graphic novels. Students may use the library at any time during the day and monthly circulation boasts an average of 1,000+ books checked out. Our open access schedule affords Mrs. Dempsey the opportunity to collaborate with teachers and therefore better meet student needs. She offers the Jr. Great Books program to enrich the reading program of each grade level. For 40 minutes each day, small groups of students meet to discuss classic literature and develop their critical thinking and writing skills. The Jr. Great Books program also fosters students' ability to express their thoughts and to interact with other members of the group in a way that prepares them for future interactions with co-workers and family members. Another impact on students can be

seen through the 4th grade Media Aide program. Students must apply for this position and the application process involves a written application, several training sessions, classroom teacher recommendation and a performance test. The students eagerly anticipate the opportunity to participate in this program. They learn the bones of media operation, but more importantly, Mrs. Dempsey encourages the value of responsibility, the volunteer spirit and the joy of helping others. In this day of data driven curriculum, perhaps the most important impact Mrs. Dempsey has on student learning is one that cannot be quantified. Mrs. Dempsey genuinely cares for each and every student at our school and takes the time to develop a personal relationship with them and I believe each one knows it.

**4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.**

Mrs. Dempsey certainly exemplifies Blanche Wools statement, "The media specialist works with all the students, all the teachers, and the entire curriculum all the time." She makes our school a better place in innumerable ways. Walking into the RLC on any given day, you will find students actively working on projects on their laptops, doing research with print material, or rocking on the "Reading Porch," enjoying their favorite book or magazine. You might find a group of children dressed in black, snapping their applause as their classmates recite their favorite poems at an "open mike." Poetry Café is one of 3rd grades' favorite annual events. If you were to visit on March 2, you probably wouldn't recognize Mrs. Dempsey at all. She'll be dressed up as her latest favorite book character, serving favorite books to children in the library that has been transformed into a café. All the children will be in costume too, enjoying books that their parents or volunteers are reading to them. The Seuss Café, which has a different theme each year, serves over 400 children and 300 adults who annually attend the event. It has been described as, "Awesome!" "The best!" and "My favorite event of the whole year." It certainly promotes the home/school connection and fosters the love of reading – two very important goals for her.

Mrs. Dempsey is a dynamic instructional leader in our school. She facilitates weekly workshops to inform teachers about the latest technologies and the best ways to integrate them into the curriculum. She is the trouble shooter for the daily technical glitches that occur. She is the expert in the use of the numerous interactive white boards, movie making software, web cams, Flip videos, scanners, documents cameras and online tools like Blabber, Voice Thread, or the "Best Book Blog," in our school. She is the driving force propelling our curriculum to integrate the pedagogy of Web 2.0 and its many tools. Students are writing blogs,

making podcasts and Voice Threads, and using wikis for research while at the same time participating in an online safety and netiquette course that Mrs. Dempsey has designed. Not only are the students using these tools, but they are learning how to be responsible members of cyberspace. Mrs. Dempsey constantly hosts visitors from other school systems in Alabama as well as educators from across the U.S. and the world. The impact on student learning from the school's Media Center begins well before the school bell rings each morning. Teams of students can be found preparing for the daily newscast, "The Wright News." Our in-school telecasting studio is located in the RLC and Mrs. Dempsey trains students to write, produce and direct the news each morning. The live telecast allows the 400+ students and teachers to come together as a community for a few minutes each morning and to share successes that are occurring at school and in the community. Although the integration of technology into the curriculum is a major priority for Mrs. Dempsey, she has not forgotten her goal of making life long readers of each boy and girl at Wrights Mill Road School. To this end, she designs and implements many programs throughout the year. Each Friday afternoon, all 5th graders are invited to eat lunch in the library and listen to and participate in a book group. Named the, "5GRLC" (5th Grade Reading Lovers Club) over 80 students participate each week. Birthday Book Club affords parents the opportunity to make a donation to the library during the month of their child's birth. Mrs. Dempsey thoughtfully matches the interests of students with enticing new titles and places a bookplate in each book that children look for when they are browsing for a new book. During her tenure as LMS, over 1,500 new books have been added to the collection through this program. Two annual book fairs also generate excitement for books and allow parents the opportunity to support the library program and their child's love of reading. Mrs. Dempsey actively seeks fund for underprivileged children so that no child goes without a book during the fairs. When students were asked why Mrs. Dempsey is a great librarian they said things like, "I didn't read in 2nd grade, but now I read 3 books a day. I love to read," and, "She's the one who made everything happen these 3 years I've been at W.M.R. and the one who convinced me to read more and more everyday," or, "I love reading and Mrs. Dempsey has convinced me to read." There is no doubt that the heart of our school is the library.

##### **5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?**

Mrs. Dempsey is an instructional leader who actively collaborates with classroom teachers to teach and integrate information literacy skill into the curriculum, partner with projects that help students use a variety of resources, conduct research and to present their findings in dynamic and innovative ways. Open access scheduling allows her to meet student and

teacher needs on a minute by minute basis. She must stay in constant contact with teachers to coordinate companion lessons and provide resources to support classroom projects. Mrs. Dempsey has chaired the nominating committees for the state of Alabama's "Emphasis on Reading Program" several times. These committees select the ballot of books to be voted on by all school children in our state as their favorite book each spring. She serves as the Technology Coordinator for our school, is a member of the Alabama Virtual Library Advisory Committee, is Vertical Team Chair for the Auburn City Schools Library Media Specialists, and has served as Team Leader for the Alabama Best Practice Center's 21st Century Learners Project for the past four years. Mrs. Dempsey has been past ACS FACES Teacher of the Year (two times); WSFA's Class Act Award Winner and was invited by Microsoft Corporation to participate in their "U.S. Innovative Teachers Forum" in Redmond, Washington. Mrs. Dempsey regularly gives workshops including presentations for the State Department of Education and the Alabama Children's Advocacy Center. She was also a guest on PBS's program, "Face to Face." Teachers from around the state, country and world come to our school to learn about our Library Media program and she shares her contacts, resources, and expertise with others on a constant basis. I cannot begin to imagine a candidate more qualified or deserving of this honor. Every school should be so lucky as to have the gift of a teacher who instructs with her head and her heart, her energy and her effort, and her love and laughter. Everyone at Wrights Mill Road Elementary School "Loves Our Librarian."