Empowering Personal Financial Decisions at the Library

The Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants (PICPA) has been involved with PA Forward since its inception. This association of CPA professionals have long valued supporting financial literacy and found that they had plenty of volunteers willing to share information, but limited access to the general public. Partnering with PA Forward has allowed them to work with libraries across the state that have access to consumers, are seen as a trusted community resource, and have a need for financial literacy content. PICPA believes in supporting libraries, which they see as a valuable community resource, and see the partnership as beneficial on both ends.

PICPA coordinates programs for adults, teens, and students across a variety of financial literacy topics. These include budgeting, managing debt, home ownership, and personal finance. If a library is interested in holding financial literacy programs, they can contact PICPA and let them know what topics they’ve identified as needs or interests in their community and PICPA will provide a speaker. They ask that libraries hold registration and have a minimum of 10 people registered for each program. If you are interested in scheduling a program through PICPA, please contact Mylin Batipps, Public Relations Coordinator, at mbatipps@picpa.org.

The Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants are also focusing on their digital outreach initiatives, hosting a variety of personal finance resources on their website that libraries can use or link to at picpa.org/consumers/money-life-tips/personal-finance.

PICPA is also considering a creating a video library of short clips about different financial literacy topics that patrons would be able to access from anywhere. If you think this would be of interest to your library, please let them know!

When I spoke with Mylin and Maureen A. Renzi, PICPA’s Vice President of Communications, I asked each of them to share a story of how libraries have impacted them personally. Maureen said that when her children were young, attending children’s programs at her local library became part of their family’s regular activities. Her children are young adults now, and she believes those early library visits helped them develop a love of books. She also remembers participating in Summer Reading programs herself as a child, and how it opened up her reading horizons, teaching her that there were a variety of genres out there “besides Nancy Drew!” Mylin also fondly remembers participating in summer reading programs, including book discussion groups. He reflected on how these provided the kids in his community an opportunity to experience other people’s perspectives on the same book, and how practicing looking at things from other points of view helped to build a community at their library.

For a full list of PA Forward partners, visit www.pafoward.org

Embracing Library Networks to Demystify Insurance

The Pennsylvania Insurance Department has been partnering with the Pennsylvania Library Association’s PA Forward program since May 2017. When they learned about PA Forward they jumped at the chance to partner with libraries. One area of focus for the PA Insurance Department is consumer protection and education. They work to help the citizens of Pennsylvania understand their rights and responsibilities when it comes to insurance. With over 450 public libraries in the state, they believe that partnering with libraries gives them a network of established organizations that can help them reach people in every community.

The Pennsylvania Insurance Department has a series of guides available to libraries focusing on topics from how to shop for insurance, information on auto, health and home owners insurance, annuities, even how to carry appropriate insurance as an Uber driver. They also recently created a series of health insurance literacy videos. Each focuses on a single topic related to health insurance and is only a few minutes long. You can view all of their online resources at insurance.pa.gov. Additionally, they partner with libraries to provide informational programming during open enrollment periods and are available to present “Insurance 101” programs to the public. If you’re interested in accessing any of these resources, please contact David Buono, Jr., Consumer Liaison, at dbuono@pa.gov.

As we know, libraries are valuable to Pennsylvania citizens throughout their lives. When I spoke with David, I asked him to share a story of how libraries have impacted his life. He remembers using libraries as a place to escape to as a child, and as he grew, a place to do research. He warmly remembers using the microfilm machines to look up information about his hometown and appreciates all the additional resources for research that libraries have today.
Star Library Spotlight
Carbondale Public Library: Reaching for the Stars (and New Patrons) with Expanded Programming

by Frank Conserette III

In January of 2017, the Pennsylvania Library Association launched the PA Forward Star Library Program statewide. The initiative was designed to recognize the valuable programs offered at Pennsylvania libraries that promote and encourage five key literacies to their constituents of all ages: Basic, Information, Civic & Social, Health, and Financial. The initiative is a three-step star achievement process, with libraries first completing activities for Bronze Star status, then completing activities and connecting their programs to each of the five literacies to receive Silver Stars, and finally achieving Gold Star status.

The Carbondale Public Library, located in Carbondale, PA, is part of the Lackawanna County Library System and achieved Gold Star status in April 2018. Below is an interview with Library Director Marie Zaccone (MZ), who provides insight into the Carbondale Public Library’s journey in the PA Forward Star Library Program and advice for those libraries interested in becoming a Star Library.

When did you and the library decide to pursue the PA Forward Star Library campaign? MZ: The Carbondale Public Library began its status journey in early 2017 right after the PA Forward Star Library Program was launched as a way to assist libraries across the state to connect with their community and local institutions.

Would you please describe the library’s goals for achieving each star level, the challenges faced, and how the library has overcome the challenges to achieve success? MZ: The goal in achieving each star level is to integrate the literacies into the programming activities and focus on each aspect to enhance the overall quality of life of the patrons. We had to go outside of our comfort level and investigate all possibilities of each literacy. We have opened up our programming to include every aspect of life in the community and offer programming that would interest people who wouldn’t ordinarily look to the library for that information.

How did the Carbondale Public Library fit into the local community prior to its involvement in the Star Library program? MZ: We were always a presence in the community through the schools and children, but now we are more recognized for the variety and scope of our programming.

Tell us about your path to Gold Star status. Was the process easier or harder than you had expected? Has the whole process changed the way you think about the programs, services, and materials your library offers to the public? MZ: Much of what we do regularly fits into the PA Forward initiative, but with each literacy defined, we broadened our programming and extended our services. It wasn’t a hard process but just took some research. It turned out easier than expected.

Have you noticed a difference in the library’s role in the community after having implemented changes as part of the Star Library program? MZ: More people are coming into the library for programming and events and realizing that we are more than just a collection of books on shelving. We have become a community resource, shelter, and safe place.

What does the Gold Star and the achievements it required mean to your library? MZ: The staff is proud of our accomplishment of this status and the steps we took to achieve it. The [Gold Star] status is a recognition of what we knew we were capable of and what we can do as a library.

What does that status mean to you and your staff? MZ: The status shows the staff the potential of the library in the community and what we can do to make a difference.

Do you have a sense of what the library’s accomplishments under the Star Library program mean to the local community? MZ: The community has embraced our recognition and continues to show support and interest in the library and the programs. I think the Star recognition has cemented our position in the community as a source of information in every aspect of their lives.

After achieving the highest level in the Star Library program, do you have any advice for other libraries currently involved in the program and those that have just begun? MZ: It is not hard work. It is truly an integral part of our job. There is satisfaction in knowing you are providing people with information that can help improve their lives. We can provide the answers to their problems and help solve some dilemmas they face.

What is your advice for those libraries considering starting and those that have not yet considered involvement in the program? MZ: Don’t hesitate. Jump in. The results are rewarding and can change the whole face of the library.

More information about the PA Forward Star Library Program and how to get started can be found at PAForwardStarLibraries.org.

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