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LIBRARY JOURNAL NAMES BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA 2011

New York, New York, January 25, 2011—In recognition of its vision, creativity, community devotion, and hard work, the Naturita Community Library (NCL), in Naturita, CO, has won *Library Journal's* annual Best Small Library in America Award. The award is sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and was created in 2005 to encourage and showcase the exemplary work of libraries serving populations under 25,000. It recognizes one winning library and two finalists each year.

The Naturita Community Library will receive a cash prize of \$15,000, as well as support for two representatives to attend the 2012 Public Library Association (PLA) conference in Philadelphia, which will include a gala event in honor of the library.

The Naturita Community Library, housed in a straw bale building of stucco made from straw, earth, and sand, serves about 2,100 people in western Montrose County, CO, including the town of Naturita. The tiny town has a population of only 665 and a per capita income well below the state average. “Naturita is poor economically, but it is rich in community,” said NCL coordinator Susan Rice.

The library is open 57 hours a week spread over six days, and with two full-time and two part-time staff members, creates a vibrant and responsive community center where patrons can access technology, distance education, and a variety of programming.

Naturita Community Library's seven public computers are in use up to 200 hours a week providing Internet access to patrons who may not even have telephone service in their own homes. Library staffers help patrons with online searches for jobs and unemployment benefits.

“NCL places special emphasis on improving services, programs and outreach to children,” notes the Feb. 1 cover story by *Library Journal's* John Berry. “Now more than a third of the students are active in library programs.” The library's after-school homework help and other programs offer an alternative in a town with few nonathletic activities and help support parents who have to drive the 70 miles to jobs in Telluride.

Since January 2009, NCL has issued more than 450 new library cards. Circulation has increased by 110 percent—150 percent for children. “We truly change lives in this community,” said Rice. “Through our young children, we are changing the culture here.” Among the programs for adults, the library has partnered with University Centers of the San Miguel to increase access to higher education through videoconferencing.

“At a time of economic stress when more Americans rely on their libraries than ever, we’re delighted to recognize the contributions of Naturita Community Library, which is the solid centerpiece of its community, and a model for other libraries large or small,” said Francine Fialkoff, *LJ* Editor-in-Chief. “We’re grateful for the expanded support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which continues to recognize the importance of libraries to the economic and political health of our nation.”

The full *Library Journal* article on the Best Small Library in America award winner can be found at www.libraryjournal.com/naturita and the criteria and guidelines for the 2012 nomination can be found at www.libraryjournal.com/bestsmall.

The Best Small Library in America award program has named two finalists in addition to the winner. Beginning in 2011, each finalist will each receive a \$5000 cash award, as well as funding for two library representatives to attend the bi-annual PLA conference and award celebration.

The 2011 Best Small Library in America finalists are:

Ames Free Library, North Easton, MA; Madeline Miele Holt, Executive Director

Housed in a historic but quite small H.H. Richardson building, the library recently completed a renovation after a 14-year bid to expand failed. Throughout, the library has offered a lineup of smart programs, fueled by the library staff’s creativity and successful grant-writing, and it has helped bridge the user computing gap with a nimble thin-client network, wireless access, and laptops for patron use. Computer Tutors offer one-on-one training to help bring patrons to the next level.

Page Public Library, Page, AZ; Debbie Winlock, Director

From its perch on a red-rock bluff in the remote town of Page, near Lake Powell, this dynamic library reaches across the desert toward Flagstaff, serving residents of Page as well as a series of tiny communities and the nearby Navajo reservation. A finalist for the award in 2005, the library offers almost daily programs for patrons in its six-day schedule. An offsite book loan program extends the library’s footprint, and some 24 desktop and 15 laptop computers address the needs of the population of 10,249, as do recently acquired equipment to access distance learning.

“We are honored to help recognize these innovative libraries, which have excelled at understanding and meeting the needs of their communities,” said Jill Nishi, Deputy Director of U.S. Libraries and Special Initiatives at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, who commended the NCL and this year’s finalists. “They serve as remarkable examples of how libraries can develop and sustain the critical services their communities need, including high-quality technology and Internet access.”

ABOUT *LIBRARY JOURNAL*

Founded in 1876, *Library Journal* is one of the oldest and most respected publications covering the library field. Over 100,000 library directors, administrators, and staff in public, academic, and special libraries read *LJ*. *Library Journal* reviews over 8,000 books, audiobooks, videos, databases, websites annually, and provides coverage of technology, management, policy, and other professional concerns. For more information, visit www.libraryjournal.com. *Library Journal* is a publication of Media Source Inc., which also owns *School Library Journal*, *The Horn Book Magazine*, and Junior Library Guild.

ABOUT THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.