

The National Medal for Museum and Library services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exciting ways. San José Public Library director Jane Light and community member Vikram K. Kanth traveled to Washington to receive the national medal and spoke to IMLS about how the library impacts the community.

Jane Light: San Jose is very diverse. I think one of the things that it makes that so fun. About 40% of the people who live in our county, our city were born in other country and speak a language other than English at home, as their primary language. But one of the great things about the library is actually one of the few places where everybody ends up at the library and mixes and matches and learns about one another and that is to me one of the wonderful parts of a library.

Vikram K. Kanth: Growing up the library is probably one of the most important things to me. Story from my very, very early childhood I randomly ran in to the library and that was probably the first time my parents had gone in to a library in the United States. And so when I ran in to the library, the librarian kindly picked me up from my parents and so that's when my parents discovered the joys of the library and that it provides services to everyone not just members of that respective community and citizens of the United States and that a library was truly an open place for the entire community. As I grew older the library became more of a place for me to do a lot of work and that's about when I started to volunteer for the library as well.

Looking back I think that's very significant because it really introduced to me the concept of service for something that's important to me. I ran the summer reading program and I was in charge of that for all the kids at the Calabazas Library. And I realized just how many kids in my community alone came to the library on an hourly basis just to have somewhere to hang out or to spend time with books and their friends. And it really was a safe area where they could stay, where they could hang out, have access to internet or games or books or any of these things that a lot of people take for granted in their lives and it was a very valuable place for them to be able to be themselves. What really served as the catalyst for me to start GROW was my learning of the bond measure that the city of San Jose setup for the Calabazas Library, set aside money as a partial tax for the rebuilding of the library. So the building itself, the plumbing and that kind of thing but all the things inside the library like the books, and the things of that nature weren't being provided for by the city itself, so they needed money for that.

Jane Light: Well Vikram and with GROW came to our foundation with this great idea, that he wanted to raise funds but he had a specific idea which was with some of his friends put on a concert of kind of classical Indian music, getting the musicians who were quite well known in the area to donate their time and to sell tickets and raise I think it was around \$2500 on the event. But it was a really great example to us of the whole community coming together to make it possible to have the new branch open. Early on we recognized that our city just does not have the tax basis some of the cities around us have and it was unlikely that we were ever going to have the kind of per capita support they have. On the other hand, when I first came 15 years ago our business was going up 15 and 20% a year. And it's tripled since I have been there so we realized that we were

never going to triple our staff, we are going to figure out some ways to deliver service to our community with kind of what we have.

And so we have really focused on figuring out ways to be both more efficient and maintain our efficiency, effectiveness at the same time. In some libraries, when people, library director say well lets go to self check out and lets do self service there is a lot of resistance, I don't want to lose my job, our library was like thank heaven someone has an idea and they leapt forward to try it and were quite willing to try it and its widely successful 96% of the items are checked out by the customers themselves. Freeing our remaining staff to work on things that really add value to help people who are looking for specific things and need help. And that began us the whole stream of things that became more ways to be efficient for us and now other libraries come to see us and we actually charge a consulting fee for libraries to come and see what we are doing. So its something we are very proud of because we think a lots of libraries can do it and it's actually kind of an obligation to every year become a little more efficient and yet keep your effectiveness, just as the voter should expect us to do that and something I think all of us who work in the library, all the volunteers are pretty proud of the way we have gone about it.