

2011 Medal Winner San Jose Public Library

Speakers: Host, Jane Light & Vikram Kanth

Transcription provided by:
Caption First, Inc.
P.O. Box 3066
Monument, Colorado 80132
877-825-5234
www.captionfirst.com

>> HOST: The National Medal for Museum and Library Service is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exciting ways.

San Jose Public Library Director Jane Light and community member Vikram 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 that's one of the things that make it the most fun. About 40% of people who live in our county and our city were born in another 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. That is to me one of the wonderful parts of a library.

>> VIKRAM KANTH: Growing up the library is probably one of the most important things to me. A story from my very, very early childhood; I randomly ran into the library and that was probably the first time my parents had gone into a library in the United States. And so when I ran to the library a librarian kindly picked me up for 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. 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 me to 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. 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. 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. It was a very valuable place for them to be able to be themselves.

What really service as the catalyst for me to start Grow was my learning of the bond measure that the city of San Jose set up for the Calabazas Library. They set aside money as a partial tax for the rebuilding of the library. The building itself, the plumbing, 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 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 \$2,500 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 had.

On the other hand when I first came 15 years ago, our business was going up 15 and 20% a year. It's tripled since I've been there. We realized that we were never going to triple our staff and we were going to have to figure out some ways to deliver service to our community with kind of what we had.

We have really focused on figuring out ways to be both more efficient and maintain our effectiveness at the same time. In some libraries, library directors say well let's go to self-

check out and let's do self-service. There's a lot of resistance. I don't want to lose my job.

For our library it was like thank heaven someone has an idea. They leapt forward to try it and were quite willing to try it. It's been wildly successful; 96% of the items are checked out by 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. That began as the whole stream of things that became more ways to be efficient for us.

Now other libraries come to see us and we actually charge a consulting fee for libraries to come and see what we're doing. It's something we're very proud of because we think lots of libraries can do it and actually it's kind of an obligation to every year become a little more efficient and yet keep your effectiveness just as the voters 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've gone about it.