

2019 Honorary Grand Marshal Putnam County Columbus Festivities

Michele Capozzella

When I was little, I became obsessed with a book at my local library called [A is for Annabelle](#). I begged my mother to read it to me every time we visited, and I would cry when another child would dare take it out so this book wasn't there when I came looking for it. I began working as a library page at my hometown library in New Jersey when I was 16, and I would often recommend this book to other children. Over the last thirty years, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to see children discover their neighborhood library and all that it has to offer.

I was born in Rutherford, New Jersey (yes, I'm a Jersey girl) on February 12, 1967. We lived with my maternal grandparents while my mother worked at the Rutherford Library, and my grandfather was employed as an insurance salesman. I attended Rutherford High School, and continued my education at Rutgers University where I received a Bachelor of Science in Economics in 1990, and a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) in 1997.

After college I accepted a position as the Head of Teen Services at the Chappaqua Library in Westchester County, a job I held for 12 years. It was there that I met my husband, Peter Capozzella, who had stopped in at the library to visit his Aunt Martha who was working at the Reference Desk. Two years later we were married. An avid pet lover, Pete is a project manager for the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and enjoys golfing, traveling, cooking, and watching movies.

In 2004, Pete and I moved with our two cats to Danbury, CT. Danbury Library became my hometown library, and in 2009 I was appointed Assistant Director, a position that I held until 2012 when I was promoted to Director of the Danbury Library.

Then, in September of 2013, I was excited to learn that the Mahopac Public Library Search Committee had selected me to serve as the Library's Executive Director and CEO. Since being appointed in October of that year, I have been continually inspired by the staff, Board of Trustees, and the Friends of Mahopac Public Library – all of whom work tirelessly to foster our Library as a center of social, educational and recreational activities, a trusted resource for information and learning opportunities, and as a path for our patrons and visitors to define their aspirations for the future.

It's been a rewarding experience for me to learn more about our neighbors and our town, and to become actively invested in Mahopac's growth and development. Beginning in 2016, I had the opportunity to work with our Long-Range Planning Steering Committee which included Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell, Regina Morini, as well as members of the Library Board of Trustees and President of the Friends of MPL, to initiate a long-range planning project. The goal of this effort was to update our Library's role in meeting the changing needs of our constituents. Following a series of Community Conversations with nearly 300 local residents, business leaders and elected officials, a three year long-range plan was established which serves as a strategy for collection development, expanding programs and services, integrating innovative technologies, and preserving the Library building and its' assets.

During my tenure we have updated our website, received a grant to add assistive technology to our Learning Lab, initiated a Homebound Delivery Service, and partnered with local businesses to host Little

Library Bookshelves at the Freight House, Sycamore Park, Liberation Yoga, the William Koehler Senior Center, and the Department of Probation in Carmel.

In addition, I have gotten to know the Mahopac school administrators by hosting them at an annual breakfast at the Library. This informal event has strengthened the partnership between our staff members and local teachers, librarians and school leadership. I have joined with the Friends of Mahopac Library, staff members and volunteers to participate in the Mahopac and Carmel Street Fairs, and maintain a table at the 4H Fair. Together with the members of the Building and Contracts committee of the Board we have tackled several facility projects including insulating the Library attic, installing energy efficient boilers, and planning the renovation of the 1st floor.

Under my leadership, the Library received a Spotlight Award in recognition of excellence in the area of Emerging Technology, and a Preserving Local History Award from Paul Eldridge, Director of Putnam County Personnel. This award was given to MPL in June 2017 for the digitization of the Putnam County Courier 1849-1930 at the Putnam County Day 205th Birthday Celebration presented by the Putnam County Historian's Office.

The rewards of watching students and young adults seek out our library as an active, welcoming place are endless: from a local high school student painting a mural on a Library wall to Eagle Scouts creating a Flag Deposit Box and a new Bike Rack, from the Teens Who Care group to our community service volunteers, and from the displays of artwork by MSCD students to the Teen Theatre, Balloon Club and Anime group participants, we are energized by their enthusiasm and creativity.

It has been a pleasure connecting with the other Putnam County Library directors through the Putnam County Libraries Association, and an honor to serve as their president for the past three years. I am also a member of the Central Library/Collection Development Advisory Committee of the Mid-Hudson Library System.

Mahopac Public Library is a vibrant and energized place; our services continue to evolve, both within and beyond our walls, to meet the changing needs of the diverse population we serve. By providing both traditional and innovative programs and resources, we strive to be a leader in the development of our community.

I extend my thanks to the Italian American Club and the Columbus Day Festivities Committee for the privilege of being chosen as a 2019 Honorary Grand Marshal. I'd like to think that my Sicilian great-grandfather would have been quite proud of this wonderful honor!