

Manitou Librarian shelves the book on her career

- Guy Priel

After seeing the Manitou Public Library transition from a division of the City of Manitou to a member of the Pikes Peak Library District 13 years ago, Margaret Morris recently closed her career, shelved her last book and retired from the Manitou Springs Library.

Michael Doherty, who oversees the west branches of Pikes Peak Library District, called her a shining star in Manitou. His task is to find her replacement, which, admittedly, will not be easy. "We are looking for someone who has a Master's degree and experience, as well as someone familiar with the area," he said, during a recent retirement party for Morris held at Manitou Art Center. "The process has begun, but will take some time." He will oversee operations and work with existing staff until a permanent replacement can be found.

Although a native of Kansas, where she attended the University of Kansas, she has been familiar with Manitou Springs most of her life, as her family owned a cabin in Green Mountain Falls, where she would spend time on family vacations. She began her career as an elementary school teacher, teaching grades one to three for 10 years before deciding she wanted more out of a career.

"After teaching for 10 years, I fell in love with libraries," Morris said, during an interview at her retirement party. "Teaching had changed and I no longer wanted to do that. They began to teach to the test and it wasn't what I wanted."

She arrived in Alamosa in 1988 because her husband worked for Adams State College, where she started working as a substitute teacher. While there, she answered an advertisement for a part-time children's librarian in Alamosa and began studying on-line for her Master's degree and became full-time librarian in 1992.

She studied through the University of Illinois Champaign with computer classes on the computer conducted in real time. It is the same university where her grandmother received her Master of Library Science in 1902. Her grandmother was director of the Carnegie Library in Morris' hometown.

"It was a real challenge for me," she said, "because the classes would be held on Central time and I was living and working in Mountain time. The library director was real accommodating, however, and that helped me complete my degree."

She served as manager of the Ute Pass Library in Cascade and the Manitou Springs Public Library while both were independent entities.

"At the time I started here (in Manitou Springs), the library was a division of the City of Manitou," Morris said. "My biggest accomplishment was putting the proposal together and getting the voters to approve the merger with Pikes Peak Library District."

According to Morris, merging the library helped because of funding issues. Becoming a part of Pikes Peak Library District also helped provide staff and resources they didn't have as part of the city. The City still owns the building, however, which has grown outdated and has long outgrown its original usage. Since it is a historic landmark, change has been slow in coming and the Manitou Arts, Cultural and Heritage Initiative will help a lot in making needed improvements for everyone wanting to use the library.

“Working in a library is so wonderful,” Morris said. “You get to work with staff, residents and members of the business community. You also get to meet with other library directors across the state and region. It’s a great networking opportunity.”

The things she has enjoyed most during her work at the library was the interaction she had with staff and members of the community. “They become like a family,” she said. “The idea of helping people become life-long learners and helping children read is wonderful. It is so great to turn children on to reading.”

Her one regret in life is that she spent the first 10 years of her career teaching when she really loved libraries and could have been working in one earlier in life. “If I could do it all over again, I would start as a librarian,” she said. “Teaching was fun, but not as fun as being in the library. I can’t imagine anything more fun than that.”

Her greatest love is reading historical fiction, biography and psychological thrillers. She has many favorite authors which she has read over the years, but one of her all-time go-to authors is Jodi Picoult. She also loves the work of Jonathan Kellerman.

Although she is saying goodbye to the library, she will remain a part of the Manitou Springs community and looks forward to visiting the library as a patron to check out new releases, as well as gardening and working on her house. Her immediate plans include a trip to visit her sister in Washington, D.C. for the holidays. After that, who knows, she admits with a shrug, as travel remains high on her list of things she wants to do in the immediate future.