

Kurth was longtime SU trustee

Q. A July 5 *Sun* article talked about replacing the name of a Southwestern building from Ernest Kurth to Ernest Clark. I don't have a problem with that, but who was Mr. Kurth?

A. I received similar questions from two other readers.

To Survive and Excel, The Story of Southwestern University 1840-2000 by William B. Jones, describes Mr. Kurth as a 1905 SU graduate. He was elected a trustee in 1929 and served as a board member until his



ASK ME

Ellen Greeney

death in October 1960.

In those early years, Mr. Kurth served on the committee along with six other men charged with formulating a financial plan to preserve SU "as a class A college in Georgetown" when consolidation and relocation threatened

the campus.

In the late 1940s, he donated "\$10,000 in an endowed scholarship for the School of Fine Arts, in addition to stimulating another \$30,000 in gifts. Included in these gifts was the purchase of a new electronic pipe organ."

He made additional donations of about \$90,000 and later the Kurth Golf Course and the Kurth Tennis Courts were established.

Privately, he was an "East Texas lumberman ... a modern man in the forestry business, supporting reforestation and the establishment of the Texas State Department of Forestry. His greatest business venture was his decision to manufacture quality newsprint from southern yellow pine, a process that had never before been attempted commercially. He turned his company into a great complex of enterprises throughout the South, one of them being the Southland Paper Company."

In 1959, qualified students were denied admis-

sion for lack of dormitory space. In 1960, "The Board authorized the Building Committee to proceed with the planning for construction. The building would be named the Ernest L. Kurth Hall. It would be the Board's way of honoring Kurth for his many benefactions over a period of 31 years that helped make it possible for the institution to survive."

"Kurth's wife, Isla Kinsolving Kurth, attended the dedication of Kurth Hall in 1962. Ernest Jr. replaced him on the Board of Trustees in the year of his father's death and served 23 years."

Q. Since it's the Georgetown Art Center, can a small space in the Art Center be devoted to Georgetown artists only

on a rotating, competitive basis? Our town has so many talented artists of all stripes and an exhibit in the Art Center, even a small one, would be considered a prestigious honor for the artist.

A. Gary Anderson, art center coordinator, responded:

"Short version: There are three ways for artists to show work in the Georgetown Art Center: 1) Submit a proposal, 2) Submit individual artworks to our open artist calls, 3) Reserve our downstairs studio and host an art-related event (this option is subject to COVID restrictions).

"Long version: Our exhibition schedule is set well in advance with signed com-

mitments to artists that are booked through 2020 and 2021. We accept artist proposals in December/January each year and offer at least one open call artist opportunity each year. These opportunities allow artists to choose their themes and subject matter.

"The proposal process will reopen this December. Artists should keep an eye on our website for more information. Also currently, there is an opportunity for artists to show work this fall in our annual open call exhibit, *Art Hop*. *Art Hop* permits artists to submit up to five artworks in any medium and theme. The *Art Hop* deadline is July 31 and there is more information on our website."

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Library weathers the storm of COVID-19

The Georgetown Library building was closed to the public March 16. A week later curbside pick up was in place until the state and county issued "Stay at Home" rules. Home delivery service was then offered until "Stay at Home" orders were lifted and curbside service returned. Throughout this period, the staff continued children's programming virtually through Facebook.

The building was closed to the public for 46 days but through hard work, ingenuity and dedication the library continued to serve the community. I interviewed Library Director Eric Lashley about the rollercoaster ride the library experienced during the pandemic.

Q: The library plays such an important role in the City of Georgetown. Can you expand on the value of libraries in such unusual times as a pandemic?

Eric: One of the most rewarding things to happen during the pandemic was the large numbers of letters, notes, emails and comments we received on social media thanking the staff for continuing to provide library materials to our patrons. When people were stuck at home, many turned to the library to provide books, DVDs, puzzles and other materials to help pass the time. It is clear our library is well loved and used by our community.

Q: The library is very different now. Has that



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Linda Dwyer

been an adjustment for the employees?

Eric: The library that reopened May 1 doesn't look or feel anything like the library pre-COVID. To open safely, we had to provide PPE to staff and visitors, place plexiglass shields on service desks, remove seating, toys, and public computers, restrict access to meeting rooms and enhance custodial services. We now require all patrons to wear masks. We created a grab-and-go service which allows patrons to checkout materials but not linger in the Library.

From day one, staff have continued to work throughout the pandemic, and this has been stressful. Staff are grieving for our former pre-pandemic job duties. What made our library a national medal-winning library was our in-person children's and adult programming. Summer is normally our busiest time of the year with our Children's Summer Reading program. We had to cancel all in-person programming this summer. My job has



The library's bookmobile has continued service during the pandemic.

also changed. I used to attend a lot of in-person meetings with other city staff members, civic organizations and library supporters. Almost all my meetings are now held virtually.

Q: How are you coping?

Eric: Some days are better than others. I consider myself an introvert, but this pandemic has shown me how much I miss meeting with others in-person. I need to read body language and need the chit-chat which happens before and after a meeting. It is hard to have human connection

six feet apart without seeing people's faces when people are wearing masks. I miss interacting with our patrons and wonderful volunteers. I spent the last 20 years of my career working to build the most welcoming library in the world. I feel the pandemic has forced me to go against my very nature and make the library less welcoming to keep everyone safe and that has been challenging.

Q: What are you reading? How are you de-stressing?

Eric: I'm currently reading David W. Blight's *Fred-*

erick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom and John Grisham's *Camino Winds*. One nonfiction and one fiction.

I have been able to take some time off and just ride my bicycle out in the country. My current favorite ride is to Granger and back. I do miss going to restaurants and other social gatherings.

Q: I understand there is a fund raiser for the library?

Eric: Yes, due to a dip in sales tax revenues, the city asked departments in the general fund to make some budget cuts this fiscal year. The library cut \$30,000 from

our materials budget. The Friends of the Georgetown Public Library launched a fundraising campaign called "Our Library, Our Lifeline" to help lessen the impact of the cuts.

(go to <https://folgeorgetown.org/> for more info)

In 2018, under the leadership of Library Director Eric Lashley, the Georgetown Public Library became a recipient of the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. The nation's highest honor is given to museums and libraries that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities.

Adult Summer Reading; two librarians depart for new adventures

The library's virtual summer reading programs for children and teens ended in July, but the Adult Summer Reading Program continues into August with the theme "Who Tells Your Story?" The finale event will be an indoor community art installation made of individual paper feathers created by library patrons.

Participants will decorate paper feathers that staff will use to create two large wings that will be on display in the library on August 19. Anyone age 18 or older is invited to pick up or download and print the template for a feather and then to decorate one or more with words, photos, doodles or color. Completed feathers should be submitted digitally or in person by August 17. Library staff will cut them out and film

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Dana Hendrix

the creation of the wings in time lapse and post the video on social media. Participants in the Adult Summer Reading Program are eligible to enter a drawing for prizes that include a Kindle Fire tablet as well as travel mugs, t-shirts, and more. Get more information about the Adult Summer Reading Program on the library's website.

In a sad note, tomorrow the library staff will be saying goodbye to two of our librarians, Melissa Mote and Kristina Gonzales Zepeda.

Melissa Mote has been the library's Teen Services Librarian since May 2013. During her time as a member of the Children's Services department she

has focused her attention on teens' unique needs and abilities. When asked about something she initiated during her time at the library, she said, "The thing I'm most proud of is growing the Teen Advisory Board from a group of less than 10 that met once a month, to a robust group that sometimes neared 20 teens and met once a week. In my time here, I took teen services from a librarian-down program planning model to a teen-centered approach. It was really important to me to give teens a voice and sense of autonomy in their library services, from planning to implementation, to empower them as leaders and community members."

Melissa kept us all aware of the teens, and she said, "I will miss getting to help teens actualize their big,

creative, off-the-wall programming dreams, and also how much they sent me into fits of side-splitting laughter." Melissa will be moving out of state to pursue new creative ventures.

Kristina Gonzales Zepeda joined the library as a Cataloging Librarian in April 2015. Kristina has worked hard in our Technical Services department to see that the library materials people want and need can be in their hands quickly, and are accurately reflected in our catalog so they can be located. Kristina also used her enthusiasm and interest to bolster our adult programming and helped the rest of the staff in our effort to keep Georgetown's underserved populations in mind in all we do. When asked about something new she initiated at the library during her

Library events

Adult Summer Reading Program through Aug. 19 (virtual)

Confronting Racism: A Community Conversation Aug. 31 (virtual)

Rachael Hurst: *The Color of Animals* exhibit through September 27 (Bridge and Hall galleries)

Jennifer Gillen: *Petal & Ink* exhibit through September 27 (Café Gallery)

For more information: library.georgetown.org or call 512-930-3551

time here, Kristina said, "I helped launch the Adulthood brand programming, the Adult Summer Reading Program and GPL World

Cinema. I am really proud of all our events!"

The pandemic has put a damper on the library's programs, but over the past four months Kristina helped take adult programming virtual with trivia nights and a recent Adult Summer Reading zine-making tutorial. Kristina says she misses doing programming in person, and she will miss her friends at work after she leaves her position.

She has accepted a part-time job at the Round Rock Public Library, which will allow her to spend more time at home with her new blended family.

We will miss Kristina and Melissa, and we wish them well!

Dana Hendrix is the Fine Arts Librarian at the Georgetown Public Library.