

Libraries help shape the lives of people and their communities, says new CEO



By Brock Weir

Some people might think of a dusty pile of books when they think of libraries, a place where one has to be quiet and, if not, you get a stern 'shush!' from the nearest Librarian.

This is an idea that was challenged by Jill Foster over her term as CEO of the Aurora Public Library, and her successor, Bruce Gorman, will continue to challenge it.

Mr. Gorman took the helm of the Aurora Public Library (APL) last month after his appointment was announced in July. He comes to Aurora with over a decade of senior-level public library experience, first in Nova Scotia and, most recently, as CEO of the Woodstock Public Library.

When he started his career, Mr. Gorman tells *The Auroran* he was first focused on information and technology, working with platforms like Ticketmaster. Eventually, however, it came time to look at his future and he felt that future lay in information management.

'The explosion of information continues to occur on a much more rapid pace now,' he says. 'I went off and did some schooling in the United States, got my degree, and that led right away to my employment with the Halifax Public Library. My love affair with libraries landed on the day I landed in Halifax and I just think libraries are the greatest places.'

'A lot of people say libraries are not agile, but they are very agile. They change and shift with communities and they have even done so in recent years. We have turned these into 'living room' community spaces, not these quiet, 'shush-able' places. The services that libraries offer to communities are really unsurpassed, and I just think it is so exciting to help shape people's lives as they continue to grow and live in their communities' and the Library is an awesome place to be able to do that.'

Over his tenure in Woodstock, Mr. Gorman takes great pride in his efforts to establish the city's public library as more of a community destination' and part of the formula was to 'just add water.'

It was definitely not a 'shush-able' space and they broke outside of the traditional library model, working with their local parks and recreation department to hold story time sessions in the local pool. That's right' librarians would be in the water with their books, sharing stories with young swimmers and their families.

'It was really good making people more aware in Woodstock of what their library can do for them, which I have always done,' says Mr. Gorman. 'I am continuing to change that perspective that libraries are quiet places where you got books because we figured a long time ago that if we wanted to stay in that spot we would become irrelevant in a modern world. We've changed, we're agile and you can come in and not be shushed, make noise, have coffee, watch an entertainment event, learn to use your computer. It is a really interesting shift. 10 years ago, people were saying, 'Google's here, so why would you go to a library?' We proved that wrong as well.'

In looking to Aurora, Mr. Gorman says he likes to go to places where he feels he can have an impact. He saw Aurora as a 'really vibrant' community, and there was an opportunity here to make a positive impact.

'We have a lot of people who walk through the doors here, but the more people I can get through these doors, and the more we are

heard in conversations around Town, the better," says Mr. Gorman. "The more that the Library is on the tongues of people, that translates to more people coming in here and using our facilities and us coming up with different, creative ways to engage the people. That is the benchmark: when I can go up the street and people really know why their Library is so important to them and their entire community.

"I would love to have a crystal ball and say I knew what was going to happen in 10 years [but] libraries will become more relevant and more integrated into people's lives as we become more technology-driven. Sometimes technology is isolating and people can go down into the basements of their homes and have 5,000 Facebook friends, but people also need places to go. Sometimes in communities it is hard for local governments to provide all kinds of places to go and engage with them, but libraries are always a staple. It's always going to be a place where you can come and engage, if not sit and read a book, engage with friends and colleagues, or operate your small business. I think in the future we will become an even more relevant place where people can engage with us and for us to be a part of their lives."