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Kewaskum Librarian turns back on ALA, “censors” books? Movies?

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Kewaskum Librarian turns back on ALA, “censors” books? Movies?

It seems the West Bend Library Board was wrong. The ALA was wrong, too. Unless, of course, Kewaskum Public Library’s director, Steev Baker, is the one who is wrong.

According to a recent open records request, Baker posted (July 30, 2009) to the Midwest Federated Library Share message board these quotes from a recently rewritten American Library Association (ALA) Bill of Rights:

“The adoption, enforcement, or endorsement of any of these rating systems by a library violates the Library Bill of Rights.”

And

“In addition, the inclusion of ratings on bibliographic records in library catalogs is a violation of the Library Bill of Rights.”

Baker goes on to comment, *“The above quotes are from a recently released ALA “interpretation” of the Library Bill of Rights. How seriously do we, as institutions, take this “Library Bill of Rights?” During the famous West Bend Fiasco of ‘09, local media and bloggers made much of the power of the ALA and its Library Bill of Rights. The Fiasco was framed as a fight between community standards and the standards of a national, liberal-biased group; David vs. Goliath (in more ways than one). With these new interpretations by the ALA about game and film ratings, it appears that the bloggers weren’t far off. Who is the ALA to tell us how our local policies should address media content ratings? What is the power of this “Library Bill of Rights” that it can control even our bibliographic records? What does it mean to “violate” this bill of rights and who enforces it?”*

Dwight Foster Public reference librarian Amy Lutzke responds:

“Excellent questions. Doesn’t the omission of information about a particular item in the library’s holdings constitute censorship or, at the very least, crappy cataloging? Why would a library want to censor the ratings listed on their visual materials? Wouldn’t identifying an audio book as “abridged” be a violation of the ALA’s Bill of Rights? After all, some of us have very strong feelings about abridgement!”
Amy

The day before this posting, Baker warned other librarians about purchasing the HBO series “True Blood.” He states, *“Before you go rushing out to purchase it, however, you should know that it is “not rated.” Despite what the bib record says (“TV-MA”), since it is a cable show it does not fall under the same ratings as network shows. There is a lot of very explicit sex and very, very strong language. Not a ton of violence.....but what killings there are are very gory.....it is definitely for mature audiences only.”*

Baker’s solution?

He tells West Bend Library’s assistant director, Sue Cantrell, *“I actually made “TV-MA” stickers to put on the spine and also a description of what “TV-MA” means on the back cover. Just so people know. Most “R” rated films list what the rating is for, but since True Blood is not rated, there is not any indication that parents of teenagers will contact the local newspaper about the content if they see their kids watching it.... Steev*

Steev Baker is doing what library directors can, and SHOULD do – meeting his community’s standards, without bowing to the pressure of the almighty ALA. Baker is right.

Added note:

If one takes a wander through the Kewaskum Public Library, they would notice that YA graphic novels are stored on the highest shelf in the YA section, accessible with a step stool. One librarian, and subsequently Baker himself, confirmed that, indeed, this is being done to keep them out of the hands of younger children.

Perhaps like THIS community, and THIS ONE, and THIS ONE, Baker actually is doing the RIGHT THING.

Thanks to organizations such as SafeLibraries, PABBIS and Family Friendly Libraries, we have resources that empower parents to see through the ALA propaganda on a local level, whether in the public library OR in the public school system.

From PABBIS:

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) recognizes that parents have a right to choose what their children will read. The NCTE also states, on their web site, that a book rationale should be done prior to book selection and that special emphasis should be placed on controversial material so that parents know when to select an alternate book. PABBIS favors this and believes the information should be objective and quantitative so parents may decide for themselves and their child.

We do agree, indeed.