



# NEWS SUCCESS STORIES

## LIBRARIES

### Billings, Montana

Billings Library patrons can continue to check out *Fifty Shades of Grey* after a review May 12 by the library's board of trustees. The trustees voted unanimously during their monthly board meeting to follow a staff recommendation not to remove an audio version of the book as requested by Ronald L. Penn of Billings.

In a statement of concern dated March 16, Penn noted that he completed the audio book through to the end. He called it "poor literature; very, very erotic" with "all kinds of sex, sex sadism and masochism."

"Even though this was a best-seller," he wrote, "I have concerns about it being in a public library."

Sales of the E. L. James book—numbering more than 100 million worldwide—is a significant reason the book is available at the Billings Public Library, Assistant Director Michael Carlson told the board.

"It didn't receive very good (professional) reviews, but it's basically there due to consumer demand," Carlson said. "Our selection policy includes patron request, which figures heavily into what we buy. This fits our criteria."

The library also has *Fifty Shades of Grey* available in book and e-book form. Since the library acquired the audio version in 2012, it has been checked out thirty-nine times. A staff memo prepared by Carlson and Library Director Bill Cochran stated that six Montana libraries and 371 around the nation offer the audio book.

*Fifty Shades of Grey*, which was made into a 2015 movie, is most commonly classified as erotic fiction. It traces the relationship between a college graduate, Anastasia Steele, and a young business magnate, Christian Grey. Amazon.com describes the story as being "notable for its erotic scenes featuring

elements of sexual practices involving bondage/discipline, dominance/submission and sadism/masochism."

In a related development, a Billings library policy that provides patrons with four computers with unfiltered access to the internet will remain in place.

In January, the Billings City Council asked the library board to create a policy for blocking access to obscene material on the library's public computers. Eighty-five of the computers have filtered internet access. The four computers that are unfiltered have recessed monitors, making it difficult for passersby to see what's on the screen.

The Billings Public Library Board voted unanimously June 9 to leave its current internet usage policy in place. In a memo to the library board, Library Director Bill Cochran and Assistant Director Michael Carlson said that during the 2014–15 fiscal year, more than 85,000 people used library computers to access the internet or the library's Wi-Fi service. By board directive, all computers in areas used by minors are filtered, and all users under the age of thirteen have the filter applied to their sessions, even if they are using a computer in another area—unless a parent or guardian has authorized unfiltered use.

"The Billings Public Library is the only large public library in Montana that filters internet work stations at all," the librarians wrote to the board. "We are already the most restrictive large library in the state."

Filtering internet access at public libraries can raise First Amendment challenges, the two librarians noted, unless the library can unblock filters on request. The Billings Public Library cannot do that without spending up to \$8,000 for new software and equipment, in addition to ongoing costs.

The city council's request came during its January 25 meeting after Councilman Chris Friedel, according to the meeting minutes, "referenced a recent news story describing an incident at the library" in which a library patron walked by a computer and saw obscene material being viewed by another user.

Library Board Member Roger Young said he wondered why the age is set at thirteen for access to the unfiltered computers—and then he answered his own question. "Some young people are now reading books I wasn't ready to read at that age," he said.

Most of the people he sees at the four unfiltered computers "are looking at financial reports or tax statements," he said, not pornographic images. "They are people who want their private stuff to remain private," he said.

"I don't think we should be filtering anything," said Board Member Bernard Rose. "It becomes a slippery slope."

The library board is made up of six appointees from the city and three from the county. According to the meeting minutes, Cochran told the city council that the city council "does not have the authority to adopt a policy for the library; that duty lies with the Library Board."

"I think Bill and Michael have put together a very good package," said Board Chair Stella Fong. "They can now go before the city council in July." Reported in: *Billings Gazette*, May 12, June 10.

## SCHOOL

### Lebanon, Kentucky

After an overwhelming show of support from educators, parents, and the local and larger community, an open school district review committee in Marion County voted to keep John



Green's *Looking for Alaska* in the high school curriculum.

The committee meeting including a presentation by Emily Veatch, defending the value of the book for high school seniors. Planning to use the novel in her senior English class at Marion County High School in Lebanon, the teacher sent home permission slips so parents would have the option, if they wanted, to keep their child from reading the book. One parent took Veatch up on that offer for her child, who would leave the room during those lessons.

"But the parent didn't want other children discussing it either," says Amy Morgeson, director of the Marion County Public Library. That parent filed a challenge against Green's novel, igniting a reaction from students, alumni, community members—and even John Green himself. The author took to Facebook, encouraging others to express their thoughts in support of the book, and Veatch, by email—and taking to task those who had chosen to judge the title "on individual scenes ripped from their context," he wrote on his Facebook page.

Marion County Public Library's genealogy librarian Jama Watts built

a banned books display with all of Green's titles. "We couldn't believe what was happening," she said. "I ran with [the display], and kind of went crazy, over the top."

Green's title stood at the top of the American Library Association's (ALA) list of the ten most frequently challenged books of 2015, with reasons noted as "Offensive language, sexually explicit, and unsuited for age group."

Reported in: *School Library Journal*, May 16.

## PRISON West Liberty, Kentucky

The Kentucky Commissioner of Corrections has said that a minimum and medium security prison in West Liberty can no longer enforce a mail policy that prohibited prisoners from receiving books and magazines that "promote homosexuality." In just a four-month period in 2015, the Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex (EKCC) used the policy thirteen different times to confiscate mail including magazines like *Out* and *The Advocate*.

On June 2, the Kentucky Department of Corrections issued a statewide memo implementing substantial changes to the department's

regulations governing prisoner mail. The changes were effective immediately and were the direct result of an ACLU investigation into mail regulations at Kentucky's prisons. The ACLU previously sent a letter demanding that EKCC end its policy of censoring mail that "promotes homosexuality" because it violated the free speech rights of prisoners and publishers.

ACLU of Kentucky Legal Director William Sharp said, "The outdated mail policies that prompted our investigation barred prisoners from receiving mail that 'promotes homosexuality,' but such policies single out pro-LGBT messages for unfavorable treatment. And that type of viewpoint discrimination by the government is precisely what the First Amendment is designed to prevent."

ACLU LGBT Project Staff Attorney Ria Tabacco Mar, who collaborated on the investigation, said, "Gay people are entitled to equal dignity, inside and outside of our nation's prisons. This policy change is a positive step forward for prisoners in Kentucky, and we appreciate the commissioner's decision to timely address this problem." Reported in: [aclu.org](http://aclu.org), June 6.