



# Ex Libris



Newsletter of the Ventura Friends of the Library P.O. Box 403, Ventura CA 93002  
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Mary Olson

Authors James and Deborah Fallows have been doing the rounds of radio interviews promoting their newly released book, **Our Towns: A 100,000-Mile Journey into the Heart of America.** The book recounts their amazing journey across the country, learning about the challenges and opportunities facing small- and medium-sized cities. In a recent interview, they were asked, if, despite political polarization, there was still a heart of the heartland, a sense of local community, some meeting place where people could gather to talk about civic engagement.

The authors said that the answer surprised them, but it won't be surprising to Friends of the Library. They discovered that public libraries "have become the institution that is, not only a social gathering place, but also a place that fills in the gaps that have been created". They observed that preschool education is a huge mission of libraries and that libraries fill in gaps in access to technology. They found people learning the basics of how to use computers, and, in small towns, young entrepreneurs having no other place to start their business, spending all day in library, using it as an office. They found that libraries are great civic centers, offering citizenship classes, esl classes, fire prevention classes, and classes in dance and poetry.

This is certainly evident in Ventura's libraries. Every year, the Summer Reading Program fills the gap that can lead to loss of skills acquired during the school year. And, our libraries are brimming with literacy classes, tech and eclectic classes.

Our library is also providing the tools for you to tell your story. Last year, stories of life around Main Street in Ventura were recorded. This year, you have been invited to share your reflections and experiences of the recent fires. These stories become part of the California State Library collection.

There is still an opportunity for you to add your story to the story of California. See the California Wild Fires Story Project on page 6. You can read history and help write the first draft of history at your library!



## Meet Mary Birch Librarian at Avenue and Saticoy Libraries

I started my career with VCL shortly after graduating from UCSB with a bachelor's in English by volunteering at the Ray Prueter Library. At that point, I fell in love with library work and enrolled in the San Jose State University's School of Library and Information Science. Upon graduating from that school in 2010, librarian jobs were scarce, so I competed at VCL for a Tech II position, which, after extra-helping a bit, I filled at Foster Library. I also, as a Tech II, worked at the Simi Valley and Oak Park Libraries. Then I returned to an extra help status as a Librarian, where I worked at every branch in the System but Fillmore. Most recently, I've had the great fortune to become the Librarian for the Avenue and Saticoy Libraries. This is where so many roads were leading me, and I am so happy to be here.