



**CHELSEA DISTRICT LIBRARY**  
BEST SMALL LIBRARY IN AMERICA

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Have you ever attended Babytime at the library with your infant? Has your student ever come home from school bursting with excitement about an author visit? Do you know a child who has earned a free book during Summer Reading?

It's all because of Karen Persello, Head of Youth & Teen Services at the Chelsea District Library.

Ms. Persello, or "Miss Karen" as she is known to Chelsea families, will be retiring this May. She has been the head of the Youth Department for 13 years. The community is invited to Karen's retirement open house on Friday, May 12, 4-5pm in the library's McKune Room.

Karen started as the lone youth librarian in 2004, when the library was housed in its temporary location in the Washington Street Education Center. Recognizing the need for diversification of programming for Chelsea youth, she began the Babytime lapsit program, as well as the 6-11 club, a monthly program for school-aged children.

She also introduced a very special program that year, R.E.A.D. to the Library Dog. The Reading Education Assistance Dogs program consists of a child reading aloud to a dog trained to "listen." R.E.A.D. dogs are trained, registered, and certified therapy animals who serve as non-judgmental listeners, assisting children with their quiet presence, and helping them develop a love of reading.

Once the library moved to its current location on Main Street, Ms. Persello was able to bring on additional youth staff to increase library collections and program offerings. One of these librarians was Lisa Anne McClure, who said that Karen taught her "that the kids came first, that they were worth your best efforts, and that any work issue can be solved by gentle and honest communication." Ms. McClure is now the Community Engagement Manager at Broward County

Library (FL), but she still recalls how “Karen gave her best to the job and to the kids, and I try to do the same.”

Early on, Ms. Persello initiated a dynamic outreach campaign to connect with children in the Chelsea School District. The Summer Reading program went from several hundred participants to over a thousand thanks to school outreach and teen volunteers. When the library was honored as the Best Small Library in America in 2008, Karen Persello’s programming, and her army of Youth Service Group volunteers, was mentioned as a major reason the judges chose Chelsea.

Another outreach program that has been a huge success is Authors in Chelsea, a two-day event during which famous authors visit Chelsea schools for presentations and workshops. The program began under Ms. Persello’s direction in 2010 with just 3 grades involved; this spring, the 8<sup>th</sup> annual event wrapped up with more than 1,000 students in grades 1-6 participating. Pat Whitney, Media Clerk at South Meadows Elementary School, said that she has “so appreciated [Karen’s] dedication to the author visits here at South Meadows, which have been meaningful for our students. She has been diligent in her choices of authors that would be the best for the 3rd-5th graders at South.”

Ms. Persello has worked with dozens of outside presenters and groups over the years. Jackie Maveal, who was presenting Storytime before Karen was hired and now leads a few Babytime programs each month, said that, “Although I am not a library staffer, [Karen] has made me feel part of the team and has always been approachable... Karen has been the perfect blend of boss and friend.”

Current Youth & Teen Librarians Edith Donnell and Jessica Zubik plan to honor Karen’s legacy at the library by continuing her work. “We want to keep doing the great programs Karen started, and continue her vision for programming for children, infants to eighteen-year olds,” said Edith Donnell. “I started working at Chelsea in 2006 and Karen has been a wonderful mentor to me.”

But they also want to honor Karen by forging ahead with innovative programming, just as Ms. Persello has done over the years. “I am so grateful for the opportunities Karen has given me,” said Jessica Zubik. “She’s never said no to new ideas-- just asked how I could make my ideas work for our Chelsea patrons.” Ms. Donnell added, “We are going to miss Karen, but she is leaving us with a firm foundation for the future.”

About Us: Chelsea District Library is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to provide equal access to quality resources that serve the lifelong cultural, educational and informational needs and interests of all people. The Library currently serves 15,100 residents in the Chelsea

district, which includes the City of Chelsea and the Dexter, Lima, Lyndon, and Sylvan townships. Approximately 16,000 individuals visit the library each month. For more information visit [chelseadistrictlibrary.org](http://chelseadistrictlibrary.org).

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