

Friday email

From: rmeyer@decaturlibrary.org
Sent: 1/8/2021 2:56 PM
To: dplstaffonly <dplstaffonly@decaturlibrary.org>
Archived: 1/8/2021 3:07 PM
Folder: rmeyer@decaturlibrary.org/rmeyer@decaturlibrary.org/Sent
Attachments: image001.png

Good afternoon,

Let's get caught up.

Promotion—Please join me in congratulating Betti Jo on her promotion for Assistant Administrative Aide to Administrative Aide. Betti Jo is not only a conscientious hard-worker, but she's one of the best people I know. She's kind and friendly and genuine, gives others the benefit of every doubt and always has good things to say about her co-workers. I'm proud to work with her and really happy that she is taking on this new role.

COVID and Library Service Levels—The Board of Trustees will have a special meeting on Monday at 4:30pm to discuss the possibility of re-opening very soon thereafter. If they decide to re-open, we'll still have reduced services like we did prior to closing. We will also keep the same hours for at least 30 more days, if not longer. The numbers in Macon County have been surprisingly good, and the Governor is considering re-opening of restaurants in the very near future as well. A word of caution—although I am hopeful, considering there is a vaccine, this may not be a one way arrow. In other words, there is every possibility that we will continue to fluctuate between open and closed and various levels of services for quite some time—months even. You all have handled the changes very well and I expect that you will continue to do so. I just want us all to be prepared—it's unlikely this will be over by spring. Or even summer.

January 6, 2021 Washington DC (contains my opinions and you do not have to read)—My heart has been heavy since Wednesday's violence in the United States Capitol Building—and other sites across the country. There are now five dead, including one veteran and one police officer. I watched in horror, as I'm sure most of you did. While this obviously claimed far fewer lives than 9/11, I somehow feel that the impact is and will be similar. And this time: we have no one else to blame but ourselves.

Well this is work and we aren't supposed to talk about touchy subjects at work. Only we should. And we must, I think, at least those of us who are interested in these issues. We cannot remain trapped inside of our own bubbles where we only talk to those who agree with us and avoid the discomfort of talking with those who disagree. Because that is, at least in part, how we got here. I want you all to know that this is OK to talk about if you want to—even at work. You simply have to follow the rules of basic civility. That means---disagree with ideas, but don't hate the people that hold those ideas. And don't belittle or insult them. Disagreement isn't bad—it's actually good. Liberals—you need conservatives. You need to hear them—they have important things to say to you—important perspectives. Conservatives—you need liberals. You need to hear them. They have important things to say to you—important perspectives. We have to come out of our ideological hidey-holes and engage with each other. Engage with open minds and open hearts. That's how we get better. When we only hear the perspectives of those who agree with us, there eventually comes a tendency to demonize the person on 'the other side'. Who is that person? Your neighbor, that's who. Your friends and your family and your co-workers. We have to learn to talk about our disagreements with respect and while never losing sight of the fact that the other person is not your enemy.

We need to, not just be open to other viewpoints, but actively seek them out. Actively. Look for the opinion of those you disagree with and hear them. Do what you can to understand their point of view. And look for the common ground. There's almost always something that we can agree on. If you only listen to a certain kind of

radio talk show and watch a certain kind of 24 hour news and go to a certain kind of website for news—whether it’s conservative or liberal, you are at best incompletely informed and at worst, misinformed or lied to. Think twice and then think two more times before sharing unvetted news pieces, memes or videos on social media. Remember that we all experience confirmation bias or the tendency to believe reports and news pieces that confirm what we already believe—even is untrue. It’s easy to be careful with information that disagrees with what we already believe—we have no problem putting that aside or finding out where it’s wrong. I challenge you to do the same thing with information that AGREES with what you already believe. Put it to the test and see if it’s verifiably true. And never believe a meme, OK? Memes are not sources of information, they’re sources of humor or sources of lies. Nothing is easier than copying a picture, typing a lie on it, and putting it on social media. Another way to put our opinions to the test is this: I heard of lot of Democrats ask Republicans in the last four years about things President Trump did or said “what if President Obama did or said that?” It’s a valid question. It’s also one that Democrats should ask themselves—“what would I think if President Obama had said it”. Whichever party or ideological side you happen to be on, hold yourself to the same standards that you hold the opposing side. It’s even more important.

Someone once said that we are entitled to our own *opinions*, but we are not entitled to our own *facts*. I am beginning to believe that we may not even be entitled to opinions until we do our homework and understand what the other side’s opinion as well as we understand our own. We too often criticize the political (and social and spiritual, etc) beliefs of others—when in truth what we are criticizing is not even what they really believe. Opinions need to be earned, and they need to be based in fact. And please, I beg of you, always consider that you may be wrong. I may be wrong, you may be wrong. 100% certainty about politics is fanaticism.

Libraries are a unique institution. One that is both liberal and conservative. That doesn’t mean that libraries support one party or another, one political viewpoint or another. It means that libraries are liberal in that they are for the entire community—they are for all and they strive to represent as many viewpoints as possible. Libraries are conservative in that they strive to conserve the best of our culture and bring it to the attention of a new generation. I’m sure that you can think of other ways that libraries reflect both the liberal and the conservative traditions.

I believe that libraries, and those of us who work in them, owe it to ourselves and our communities to be places where truth, trust, safety, civility, and respect are the bottom line. So we can do this. We can have these conversations. We can learn to understand each other better. But we must do so with respect and civility. If you enter into one of these conversations and feel yourself getting heated—stop—take a walk, clear your head. Do NOT attack the other person verbally. And if you simply don’t want to talk about politics—just say no. You never have to. We are a family—families disagree. It’s ok and if done in the proper spirit, it’s actually good. Please understand that I am writing this to MYSELF as much as I am writing it to all of you. But I hope that it helps someone else too.

Thank you all for the work you do every day for our community. I think we make a difference. I think we can keep doing so and make a difference in each other’s lives too.

I’ll get off my soap box now, and get back to work.

Warm regards and see you Monday.

Rick Meyer
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