



*San Francisco Public Library*



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# THE HUMAN TOUCH



## SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY



LIBRARY OF THE YEAR 2018



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## EDITORIAL



### A legacy of compassionate creativity **Herrera & Co.: On a Mission**

TALK ABOUT MOMENTUM. San Francisco Public Library's (SFPL) laser focus on radical access, led by compassion and with a goal to serve all, has shaped an array of library services that are inspiring, replicable, and continually redefining what the word *library* means. Long in the lead on compassionate services—innovating early on assisting homeless patrons, for instance—the library recently stepped up to redefine what

"the library as a sanctuary for the city" could become, as it titled its entry for this award. How exactly it has done that has led SFPL to be named the Gale/LJ 2018 Library of the Year. Read all about it (p. 22–26), and celebrate what's possible when compassion, fueled by mission, shapes the library.

It's hard to win Library of the Year, perhaps harder in a period when a library's leadership is in transition. It's a testament to the solid team in place at SFPL that Luis Herrera's recent retirement from his role as city librarian did not raise questions from the judges about stability for the organization, currently headed by Acting City Librarian Michael Lambert, who was deputy under Herrera. Confidence in what had been built and is continuing to evolve was apparent in the enthusiasm from the judges in response to San Francisco's nomination, from among a very competitive field.

I have been inspired by the work by SFPL for years, having first explored the libraries when LJ held a Design Institute event there in 2008. The massive Branch Library Improvement Program (BLIP), completed in 2014, was then being implemented. Those renovations, shaped by a commitment to green thinking, helped inform my faith that libraries could and should be out front on sustainability for their communities. The smart leadership in place, including then-City Librarian Herrera, was already proving the return on investment (ROI) libraries deliver, well before outcomes were a hot topic. Herrera modeled leadership I found intriguing. Clearly savvy, he

was also kind and generous with his time. Watching him work helped cement my commitment to libraries. This was before Herrera was awarded LJ's Librarian of the Year honor in 2012, and his leadership in San Fran, as well as at the national level through the Public Library Association, has always taken the field to the next level. We can only hope that he will stay involved as a mentor and leader emeritus. I think this photo of Herrera with



HANDOFF San Francisco's Michael Lambert (l.) and Luis Herrera

Lambert illustrates quite nicely what I have seen of Herrera's leadership style. Taken at an all-staff gathering on February 23, the last day of Herrera's tenure, it strikes me as open and full of joy.

Herrera and team have also been strong on organizational design. I'll be eager to see the ongoing influence of the library's Research, Strategy and Analytics unit, which was created last year. We talk about leveraging data for libraries all the time, and this investment in integrating it into the fabric of the institution—and investing in it with skilled staffing—will no doubt yield even more ROI for patrons and insights for the library field in

general. When it comes to team building, Herrera exhibits excellent leadership development, and he shares some of his thinking on succession planning in "Bench Building" (LJ 6/1/18, p. 26–29). He obviously did a good job, with the staff and culture he built carrying the momentum forward.

The legacy of Herrera's contribution to libraries (so far) is a gift to all of us: a model library to learn from, handed off to a team aligned to serve all where they need it most—nimble and without hesitation.

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# San Francisco Public Library

“SFPL’s overall impact on it’s community is obvious as it creates exceptional programming touching all parts of the city’s diverse population,” -- *Kent Oliver, director, Nashville Public Library*

“The SFPL is nimble, creative and always inclined to find a way to make things happen. They always say Yes first and then find a way. I love them for that,” --*Author Dave Eggers*

“With a strong focus on employees and partnerships, SFPL exemplifies best practices...Many of their firsts have already inspired the profession to look differently at what they do, and, most important, what they can do.” --*Julie Todaro, past president of ALA and dean of library services at Austin Community College*

“The San Francisco Public Library plays a crucial role in supporting our city’s values and policies. Their open doors, immigration and citizenship programs, compassionate staff and community connections reflect our longstanding commitment to being a Sanctuary City.” --  
*Mayor Mark Farrell*

The logo of the San Francisco Public Library, featuring a stylized sunburst or fan-like design in shades of red and white.

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