

Austin has a new children's librarian

Heather Rule
hrule@postbulletin.com

Kari Oanes worked as a library assistant in her hometown of Moorhead, Minn. She found out just how much she enjoyed the job, getting to know the public and especially working with the librarians.

"I thought, why not work with them for the rest of my life?" Oanes said.

She's off to a good start on that one. Oanes is the new children's librarian at the Austin Public Library. She started work last week. She will work with children and teens to develop programming.

The library has been without a children's librarian for three summers. Oanes already knows that there are a lot of kids and teens in the area.

"So, they should have their own librarian," she said.

Oanes received her undergraduate degree from Concordia College in Moorhead, and she graduated from Simmons College in Boston in May with a master's degree in library science with an emphasis in youth service.

"I really liked working with the public and getting to know them," Oanes said. "I really loved that we were promoting lifelong literacy."

She'll have a focus on reaching out to the young ones to get them that love of reading early, and her goal is also to make sure she doesn't lose them during their teen years.

"You want to develop that love of learning and reading early on," Oanes said. "They're going to be more engaged in learning."

One of the things she would like to do is start a teen advisory board, where she would get a group of teens together and meet with them to find out what they want out of the library, "because teenagers know what they want," Oanes said, "I think the teens can be a big resource."

She also wants to introduce a lot more programming, start a teen volunteer group, get a regular children's story time on the schedule (including something on evenings or weekends). Along with building more programming, she also wants to build a collection of books for kids.

Though Oanes has been in Austin for only about a week, she did her online homework and said she liked how active the community was.

"It seems like a community really open to new ideas," Oanes said. "It's a very vibrant community."

She said she'd like to get involved in the community, because that's how you get to know the people and families you're serving.

Oanes is excited about her "first big librarian job." She was impressed that the library was still dedicated to doing its best even with the absence of a children's librarian until now, and the library overall seemed supportive, she said.