

PLAINFIELD TODAY

The needler in the haystack.

Monday, August 31, 2015

Joe Da Rold caps 21 years of service to Plainfield as Library Director



*Joe Da Rold hard at work. Computers have revc
public libraries -- and how they are run*



One of Joe's great loves is local history. Here he is in the Plainfield Room with an 1899 birds-eye map.

Today is Joe Da Rold's last day as the Plainfield Public Library's director. Beginning tomorrow, Joe starts a new life chapter as the "master gardener of Martine Avenue."

Joe has devoted the last twenty-one years of his distinguished career to making the Plainfield Public Library one of the best, most exciting and most engaged with its community in the state of New Jersey.

Gone are the days when libraries were "temples of books". Now they are centers of lifelong learning using every modern tool to serve their communities' needs for Internet access, literacy skills, job preparedness and community meeting spaces.

Many Plainfield Today readers know that I worked for Joe at the PPL for two years before moving to City Hall to become Mayor Al McWilliams' public information officer.

It was an honor to work with Joe and be a part of reinvigorating the Library as one of Plainfield's "crown jewels".

Joe has helped retool and update Plainfield's architecturally significant library building to serve the 21st century, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude.

I asked Joe to put in writing some thoughts about his time in Plainfield, and am including them below.

The Friends of the Library is hosting a celebration of Joe's career and contributions for the community. Mark your calendars for that: October 22 at the Plainfield Country Club. I will post

more details as time draws closer.



*Joe's spectacular -- and restful -- garden
will now get even more attention.*

Here are Joe's thoughts on his time at
the Plainfield Public Library --

FINDING MY WAY TO THE
PLAINFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

by Joe Da Rold

In August of 1994, the Library Board recruited for a new director, and I had arranged for an interview while here on vacation. The current library opened two years after I had moved from North Plainfield to Los Angeles, so this was first time I was seeing the current building. The building was in great disrepair, and I could tell they were impressed when I mentioned that I was president of my condominium board and dealt with vendor contracts and building problems. They asked what problems I had noticed about the library. I rattled off a list of things I noticed while awaiting the interview, from non-working elevators to inadequate ceiling lighting. They offered me the position two days later – one day before I was to fly back to the Los Angeles.

The Plainfield Public Library had once been an important library, but by 1994 the only things it had going for it were an impressive book collection, a spacious building, and a beautiful community meeting room. Inside, the library was showing its age. Had the carpet ever been shampooed? Had the drapes ever been cleaned? These were the early days of desktop computers, so there were none on the main floor, only in

Technical Services and Administration. The beautiful monolithic card catalogs were still in use, but plans to phase them out were already in place. The planned computer catalog was to be a stand-alone system. The online system was still about five or more years in the future.

Outside, huge slabs of concrete, the sides of oversized planters, were leaning at dangerous angles, the steps were crumbling on all four sides, and the sidewalks were treacherous. But the worst was to come. I was asked to work with an architect to identify building problems. The Trustees were horrified to receive a lengthy list of expensive emergency repairs. On the plus side, this resulted in the development of the 1995-96 master plan, which is still viable today. Within a year the City Council underwrote the cost of a new roof. More infrastructure changes followed, with the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funding the demolition of the cooling tower and replacement of the heating and ventilation units. As I write, The Planning Board has approved plans for renovations of the building exterior, especially to remediate safety issues on steps and sidewalks. Plans for renovating the interior courtyard are fifty percent complete.

Computers played a surprising role in how the library changed. The appearance of online databases enabled us to discontinue printed Reference volumes, opening up valuable floor space. The Archives Room, a climate controlled space funded by the City's CIP, opened in 2002, along with the remodeled Plainfield Room. The Plainfield history books were moved into the Archives Room. Funding from the State Library enabled us to create the conference rooms and Literacy offices, which opened a year later. Room 2 was created out of smaller spaces, so that community groups could have a meeting space while Children's Services occupied the Anne Louise Davis Room during the construction of the Rainforest. The Rainforest, funded by the Capital Campaign, was five years in the planning and one year in construction; it opened at the end of 2011. One year later the Job Assistance Computer Center, funded by private donations and CDBG funds, opened on the main floor. This required the shifting of every book and every book stack, ingeniously handled in-house by our Facility Manager.

When I became Director, I was thrilled to discover that the Plainfield Public Library had a fine-arts collection. My

passion for fine-art and folk-art had been ignited while working for the City of Santa Fe Springs (CA). The Mayor, who happened to be the director of the California Museum of Science and Technology, asked me to build a fine-arts collection for City Hall. The Director of the Laguna Beach Museum of Art introduced me to many artists throughout Southern California, and that led to my start as an art collector. I was dismayed to find that the library's collection had been ignored, only a few contemporary items had been added in recent years. Plainfield is home to some wonderful artists, and I am proud that so many of them are now represented in our collection, particularly artists of color. When we created the new Children's Library (aka The Reading Rainforest), I wanted folk-art to be part of the visual experience, so I was happy to donate most of my folk masks to the room.

My love for local history started in Santa Fe Springs where the historical society was strongly connected to the library. When I worked with the architect on the expansion of the library, we placed the school bell from the town's first school right inside the entrance. The bell was from the same foundry that cast the Liberty Bell. Later, I became Executive Director of the Whittier

Historical Society, and during that ten year period, I did a huge amount of researching, writing, and lecturing on local history. Working in the museum field taught me the importance of the role of the registrar, particularly in keeping donor records. The Local History Collection here at the library is a direct outgrowth from those years. Although the Rainforest is a knockout, I think the Local History program is my most important legacy to the community.

We have been very aggressive in building these research collections. Once we opened the Archives Room, the community understood our goal was to maintain archival preservation standards and make the materials available to the public. From that point on, more and more historic materials were entrusted to us. This is why the Collier Photograph Collection of 15,000 photographs came to us; likewise, the Chase and Ricketts collections of historic postcards. And had we not created the Diversity Studies Collection, the Barbara Polk Riley book collection would never have found its home here.

Along with local history and art, my other passions are writing, gardening, theatre, and reading. My love of reading and recommending books to friends

started during my college summers, driving a bookmobile for the Somerset County Library. Bookmobile customers “talk books” more than any other group of library users. This continued after my M.L.S. when I became the first Young Adult Librarian for Los Angeles County Public Library. I wrote a weekly book review column for the San Gabriel Valley Tribune, became President of Young Adult Reviewers of Southern California, and gave book talks in all of the area high schools.

One trait that sets me apart from most of my library colleagues is my involvement in community affairs. Wherever I have worked I have reached out to make sure community members were aware of how their public library could help them. In the 1970's I co-wrote a grant proposal for Library Services for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. This became a model program throughout the Los Angeles basin and much of California. It included teaching sign language to library staff members. The program was widely recognized, and I was asked to speak about the program at library conferences in Florida and Michigan.

My involvement with Adult Literacy started here at the Plainfield Public

Library. The needs of the ESL clients have always resonated with memories of my Italian grandparents. They never learned to read or write English; they learned to speak English from their four children, who never learned Italian. We lost so much of our family culture and tradition, so I have fought very hard to support our adult literacy program in Plainfield.

I will miss not being at the helm of the Plainfield Public Library, but after twenty-one years, it is time for new people with new ideas to step forward. I thank the community for the support they have shown, and I want to express deep thanks to all of those on the library staff who helped turn dreams into reality.

AWARDS - Red = Individual Awards to Joe

2014	Your Beautiful Library Photo Contest	Honorable Mention for "The Reading Rainforest" as Coolest Internal Space .	GALE Cengage Learning
2012	Roger McDonough Librarianship Award	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold, for excellence in service to the New Jersey history research community and the general public.	New Jersey Academic Alliance
2011	Trustee Recognition Award	Awardee: Anne E. Robinson, President of the Plainfield Public	New Jersey Library Association

		Library Board of Trustees, was recognized for her successful advocacy efforts to restore the library's hours.	
2011	Gail Stern Award	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold, for outstanding achievement in service to New Jersey community history, with an emphasis on cultural diversity.	Advocates for New Jersey History
2010	Librarian of the Year	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold	New Jersey Library Association
2009	RAICES Award	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold, for services to the Hispanic Community of New Jersey	RAICES, Hispanic Cultural Association
2009	Community Change Award	For development of the library's Diversity Studies Collection.	New Jersey Black Issues Convention
2008	Excellence in Leadership Award	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold	The Nubian Union
2008	Alice M. Leppert Award	For outstanding achievement by the Adult Literacy Program of the Plainfield Public Library.	LVNJ - Literacy Volunteers of New Jersey
2008	Library Service Award to a Group	Awarded to the Literacy Advisory Committee of the Literacy Volunteers, Plainfield Public Library.	New Jersey Library Association
2008	Public Relations Award Service Brochure	Awarded to Plainfield Public Library.	New Jersey Library Association

2008	Public Relations Award Program Announcement	Awarded to the Plainfield Public Library & Paul Pinkman for the promotion of the Helen Stummer photography exhibit.	New Jersey Library Association
2008	Journalism Award Coverage of Library Services & Programs	Awarded to Bernice Paglia of the <i>Courier News</i> for her article, " Librarian donates 1,881 books to Plainfield library ," describing a large gift to our diversity collection.	New Jersey Library Association
2007	Susan G. Swartzburg Preservation Award	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold, for leadership and accomplishments in the field of history and preservation.	New Jersey Library Association
2007	19th Annual New Jersey Council for the Humanities (NJCH Book Award Collection)	Thirty-six book titles will be awarded, including non-fiction humanities works by New Jersey authors or on a New Jersey subject.	New Jersey Council for the Humanities
2006	MARAC NJ Caucus Institutional Service Award	For furthering the cause of archives and history in the state, in particular for outstanding progress in acquiring, processing, describing, and preserving local history archives.	Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference - New Jersey Caucus
2006	Award for Achievement by a Community Organization	For fostering human rights and relations among the people of Union County and for promoting and advancing the understanding, acceptance and	Union County Human Relations Commission

		appreciation of cultural diversity.	
2005	Public Relations Award	For best library website.	New Jersey Library Association
2004	Award of Recognition	Awardee: Library Director Joe Da Rold, for outstanding service to public knowledge and preservation of the history of New Jersey.	New Jersey Historical Commission
2004	Community Distinction Award	In recognition for the significant improvements brought to the lives of the citizens of Plainfield.	Plainfield Chamber of Commerce
2003	Best Service Brochure	For development and publication of "A Kid's History of Early Plainfield".	New Jersey Library Association
2001	Alice M. Leppert Award	In recognition of outstanding achievement by the Adult Literacy Program of the Plainfield Public Library.	Literacy Volunteers of America - New Jersey
2000	Access Union County Award	For outstanding commitment to improving access for people with disabilities.	Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders

-- Dan Damon [[follow](#)]

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- Councilor Mapp: Mapping It Out
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- City of Plainfield
- Plainfield Public Library
- Plainfield Public Schools
- Muhlenberg Campus - Solaris
- Plainfield Health Center
- Plainfield Municipal Utilities Authority
- Plainfield Chamber of Commerce
- Plainfield-North Plainfield Rotary
- Plainfield SID
- ASPCA (Spay/Neuter Program)
- El Centro
- NAACP - Plainfield Branch
- Plainfield Habitat for Humanity
- League of Women Voters
- Plainfield Symphony Orchestra
- Crescent Concerts
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Drake House Museum
- Plainfield Garden Club
- Crescent Area Neighborhood Ass'n
- FOSH (Friends of Sleepy Hollow)
- Netherwood Heights Neighbors
- Van Wyck Brooks Historic District
- YMCA - Plainfield Area
- YWCA of Central NJ
- Plainfield Tsunami Track Club
- Queen City Baseball League
- Boys & Girls Club
- Girl Scouts
- duCret School of Art

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Forum

- MaverEcon
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- Barista (Montclair, Bloomfield, Glen Ridge)
- Blue Jersey
- Booman Tribune
- Brad Blog (Electronic Voting)
- Center of NJ Life (Hightstown)
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- Daily Kos
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- Newark Speaks
- Fr. Jake Stops the World
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- The Hillsider
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- Jersey Perspective (Montclair)
- Lefty Blogs (New Jersey)
- Mixner At Turkey Hollow
- Mystery Pollster: Demystifying Political Polling
- No Turn on Red
- Confessions of a Bathrobe Blogger
- PEptalk: Revisited
- Jackie's TV Blog
- Pam's House Blend
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- Red Bank TV (Cable issues & news)
- The Rix Mix
- The Root
- Scripting News (Dave Winer)
- Street Prophets
- Xpatriated Texan



Teddy as me, or vice versa?

 **Dan**

Plainfield resident since 1983. Retired as the city's Public Information Officer in 2006; prior to that Community Programs Coordinator for the Plainfield Public Library. Founding member and past president of: Faith, Bricks & Mortar; Residents Supporting Victorian Plainfield; and PCO (the outreach nonprofit of Grace Episcopal Church). Supporter of the Library, Symphony and Historic Society as well as other community groups, and active in Democratic politics.

[View my complete profile](#)

The QuadTech "Deal"

- (1) A 6-figure contract-less deal
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- (4) The 'extra' page - sloppiness or fraud?



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