

## Volunteer of the Month - Michelle McFarland

Anyone going to the Mark Twain Branch of the Hartford Public Library and expecting a stereotypical Librarian will be disappointed or more likely stunned. Michelle McFarland, the Branch Manager since the library moved into Hartford Public High School in 2011 is a very different kind of librarian. And it's a good thing. When you work for a Library system whose motto is "A Place like No Other" you need to expect a different experience, and there you won't be disappointed.

The volunteers that are usually featured here are either retired folks who are engaged in something different than what they did professionally or people with spare time finding a different opportunity to help out. In Michelle's case, she found the need right where she was working, at the public library housed in the high school library. Right after the move, most of the patrons were the high school students who would occasionally come there, so they're the ones she began to work with. And it was clear they needed a little extra help. Early on she partnered with then Principal Adam Johnson of the Law & Government Academy to design an afterschool program. Ironically their first grant application was turned down, and by the time it was granted, Mr. Johnson had left his position as Principal. That was nearly three years ago, and since then Michelle has carried on. With the help of Trish Barrett assistant librarian, she has expanded the Owl Enrichment Center into an after school program for 76 high school students who either attend HPHS or live in Asylum Hill.

Opportunities as diverse as Kayaking fieldtrips to North Stonington CT, museum trips to New York City, as well as art lessons from Robert Charles Hudson, and creative writing that is published in the North End Agent are just a few examples of what is offered to the students who participate. Of course homework help and SAT preparation assistance are a part of the mix, and partners like Hartford Stage and The Wadsworth Atheneum are there to help with cultural enrichment as well.

The move of the Mark Twain Branch to West Middle School this summer leaves some details of the future of this program undecided, but you can be sure Michelle is working hard to see it continues. She was a student herself at West Middle and Hartford High so she is definitely in this for the long haul.

More photos are available at: <https://goo.gl/photos/L1pojdfbQQ9X18Tw5>

