

The Future of the Bridgman Public Library:

Bridgman Public Library 60th Anniversary Celebration

**Written and spoken by Dr. Terri Hebert for the Bridgman Public Library 60th Anniversary celebration on June 30, 2026.*

Good evening, and what a wonderful evening this has been.

Tonight, thanks to John and Amy, we've had an opportunity to look back over sixty years of remarkable history. We've celebrated the vision of those who came before us – neighbors who believed that a small community deserved something extraordinary: a place where every person could learn, discover, and grow. Their gift was more than a building. It was a promise...a promise that knowledge should be accessible, that curiosity should be encouraged, and that everyone should have a place where they belong.

As I accepted the opportunity to serve as Director of the Bridgman Public Library, I realized that I inherited much more than a building or a collection. I inherited sixty years of trust. Trust built by volunteers, board members, staff, donors, civic leaders, and generations of families who believed this library mattered. That trust is both humbling and inspiring because our responsibility is not simply to preserve what we've inherited. Our responsibility is to prepare it for those who will come after us.

Earlier this month, I attended a conference celebrating our nation's upcoming 250th birthday. During one presentation, the speaker reflected on our national motto: E Pluribus Unum – Out of Many, One. As I listened, I couldn't help but think that those words also describe the story of the Bridgman Public Library. As Kyle shared information about the resources and opportunities we currently offer to our patrons, I was struck by these images:

- Out of many people – one community;
- Out of many ideas – one shared future;
- Out of many stories – one enduring legacy.

Now, it is my turn to invite you to imagine the future of the Bridgman Public Library.

Out of Many Generations – One Community

If someone were to ask me what our greatest challenge will be over the next sixty years, I don't believe the answer is technology. I believe it is connection.

We live in a world where people can communicate with thousands of others yet still feel alone. The public library remains one of the few places where everyone is welcome...children

discovering the joy of reading...teenagers exploring new ideas...parents searching for answers...remote workers building careers...older adults learning new technologies...neighbors meeting neighbors.

Imagine a retired teacher mentoring a young reader...or a high school student helping a senior learn a new device. An artist inspiring a child...or a local business owner encouraging an aspiring entrepreneur.

Learning flowing in every direction...friendships forming naturally...community becoming stronger because people simply spent time together.

Libraries have always connected people with ideas, and I believe the libraries of tomorrow will become even more important because they connect people with one another.

Out of Many Technologies – One Purpose

Technology will continue to change because it always has.

From card catalogs to computers...from printed encyclopedias to digital databases...from bookshelves alone to makerspaces, podcasts, streaming media, and artificial intelligence.

The tools will change...they always have. But the library's purpose will not.

Our purpose has never been technology for technology's sake, but about helping people confidently navigate whatever the future brings.

As information becomes more abundant...trusted guidance becomes more valuable.

As artificial intelligence becomes more powerful...human wisdom becomes even more important.

The library of the future will help people understand technology rather than fear it.

Helping students learn...helping workers adapt...helping entrepreneurs innovate...helping families discover opportunities they never knew existed.

Whether someone walks through our doors looking for a book...or internet access...or help using artificial intelligence...our response will remain the same: "How may we help you?".

Out of Many Stories – One Legacy

At their heart, libraries have always been about stories...the stories we read...the stories we share...the stories that shape who we become.

But I believe the library of the future will do something even more important. It will help preserve the story of Bridgman itself.

Every family has a story...every neighborhood...every classroom...every business...every volunteer...every child.

Imagine students interviewing longtime residents and preserving their memories...or grandparents recording stories that grandchildren will treasure decades from now. Imagine local artists exhibiting their work. Young people producing podcasts...families creating digital archives...photographers documenting our changing community.

Libraries have always preserved history, and the libraries of tomorrow will do much more...we will help create it...because legacy is not simply what we inherit...it is also what we choose to leave behind.

Out of Many Voices – One Conversation

Perhaps one of the most important roles libraries will play in the future is something remarkably simple...helping people talk to one another.

In a world increasingly shaped by algorithms...where we often hear only voices that sound like our own...libraries can become places where neighbors gather around the same table...to ask questions...to listen...to imagine together.

Imagine conversations about education...housing...economic development...environmental stewardship...the future of Bridgman.

Not debates to determine winners...but conversations that strengthen understanding.

Libraries have always been places where people encounter new ideas.

Perhaps, in the years ahead, they will become places where people rediscover one another.

Out of Many Possibilities – One Future

As we celebrate sixty remarkable years, we also begin the next chapter.

That is why the 60/60 Campaign is so important.

It is far more than a fundraising campaign...it is an investment in possibility...an investment in future readers...future creators...future entrepreneurs...future artists...future leaders.

Sixty years ago, those who built this library could never have imagined e-Books...streaming movies...artificial intelligence...or a makerspace...but they invested anyway...not because they knew exactly what the future would look like...but because they believed Bridgman deserved one.

Now...it is our turn.

While we cannot predict every innovation or foresee every challenge, we can choose what kind of community we want to become...a community where knowledge is shared freely...where curiosity is celebrated...where creativity is nurtured...where technology serves people, not the other way around...where generations learn from one another...where every story matters...where every voice has a place...and where every person knows they belong.

Increasingly commercialized...and increasingly divided...places that simply welcome people are becoming increasingly rare.

The library remains one of those places.

You can walk through our doors without buying anything...without subscribing to anything...without proving anything. You are simply welcome.

I believe that this welcoming mindset may become one of the greatest gifts a public library offers in the decades ahead.

Sixty years ago...this community imagined the library Bridgman would need.

Tonight, we can imagine the library Bridgman will need sixty years from now.

May we have the same courage...the same generosity...the same vision...and the same faith in those who will come after us...because every generation receives something precious from those who came before us...every generation can choose to make the present even better...and every generation has the responsibility to pass it along.

Out of many generations...one community.

Out of many stories...one legacy.

Out of many dreams...one future.

E Pluribus Unum...out of many, one.

Thank you.