
NEWS RELEASE



Nov. 4, 2014

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Celebrate former library director Neel Parikh

Nov. 6 public reception honors Parikh's 20 years of service and early learning legacy

Celebrate the leadership of former Pierce County Library Executive Director Neel Parikh at a public reception from 4 to 6 p.m. this Thursday, Nov. 6, 2014. The free reception is hosted by the Pierce County Library Foundation and will be held at Clover Park Technical College's [McGavick Conference Center](#), 4500 Steilacoom Blvd. S.W., in Lakewood. A program recognizing Parikh and her accomplishments begins at 4:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be served. Parikh retired Nov. 1, 2014.

Your local library: a community learning powerhouse

Since 1994, Parikh worked to transform a rural and suburban library system into a premier reading and learning center. Parikh led the library through seven annexation elections, one levy election and the opening of four new library buildings in DuPont, Fife, Milton/Edgewood and University Place. Parikh created strong relationships and put in place dozens of business partnerships with community, health and employment organizations, cities, towns, the county, schools, universities and the press.

Parikh led the way for increased open hours across the system's now 18 locations. She advocated for new and innovative services aimed at the unserved and underserved in our communities such as job services and technology training. She started Pierce County READS, a one-community one-book program that has been going strong for seven years and counting. And, she worked with the Pierce County Library Foundation and Friends of the Libraries groups to increase financial support for libraries across all sectors.

Washington state's early learning legacy

Parikh is credited with bringing the considerable resources of libraries to bear on Washington state's early learning efforts headed by Mona Lee Locke and Melinda Gates in the late 1990s. Parikh led the state of Washington to develop a federally-funded project to establish early learning services throughout the state, including in Pierce County Library System. She brought the state's library directors together and led the creation of the Early Learning Public Library Partnership. She not only co-founded the group, she served as its first chair. There are now 30 members from across the state that sit on the early learning partnership. And, thanks in part to her influence, public libraries speak with one voice when it comes to policy matters, funding and learning priorities.

Parikh also played a key role in Pierce County Library System's ground-level leadership in the formation of First5 Fundamentals of Pierce County, a community coalition of nearly 50 organizations working in partnership to foster early childhood readiness for school. Parikh strongly believes that libraries play a pivotal role in the state's educational system. "Libraries are the only free, year-round center for early learning in our communities," she said.

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A stronger library system despite the recession

During the recession, Parikh ensured that branches remained open and operating hours stayed the same despite \$7.5 million in cuts to the operating budget. With fewer resources, she led a process to strengthen the staffing model, implement efficiencies, streamline procedures and become more thoughtful and purposeful about everyday operations. During this time the library leveraged private funding in order to introduce new and innovative services such as STEM programming for young children and an interactive game for adults, Scout.

National and local accolades

Under Parikh's leadership, Pierce County Library was awarded the [National Medal for Museum and Library Service](#) in 2013. The medal is the nation's highest honor conferred on museums and libraries that have made "significant and exceptional contributions to their communities." First Lady Michelle Obama presented the award in Washington, D.C.

- Also in 2013, the library received the [Paul G. Allen Family Foundation Creative Leadership Award](#), which recognizes innovative organizations in the Pacific Northwest that are taking risks and making a meaningful impact in their communities.
- In 2012, Parikh was honored by The Business Examiner with the [Women of Influence Lifetime Achievement Award](#) for her commitment to the community and dedication to improving library services.
- In 2010, Parikh's vision to provide early learning training and support for families, child care providers and library staff earned her the [American Library Association's Sullivan Award](#).

Nationally, Parikh has served on the Public Library Association Board of Directors, Washington Library Association Executive Committee, Association for Library Service to Children and the American Library Association Council. Her leadership roles locally include president of YWCA and the Pierce County Aids Foundation. She also has been active in the American Leadership Forum, Fund for Women & Girls, and Rotary 8. She currently serves on the Tacoma Art Museum Board.

Parikh earned her bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in library science from the University of California at Berkeley. She began her 43-year library career as a children's librarian at Alameda County Library in California. Prior to coming to Pierce County, Parikh served as Coordinator of Children's Services and later as Chief of Branch Services for San Francisco Public Libraries.

Continue the early learning legacy

As a tribute to Parikh's passion for early learning, people can make a charitable donation to benefit the Early Learning Program at Pierce County Library. Find instructions at www.piercecountylibrary.org/donate

About Pierce County Library System

Established in 1946, [Pierce County Library System](#) includes unincorporated Pierce County and 15 annexed cities and towns. Pierce County Library serves more than 564,000 people through 18 branches as well as online services. The system is the fourth largest in the state and lends more than 7.5 million items each year. The library is an independent taxing district reporting to a Board of Trustees. Local taxpayers fund 96 percent of the library's revenues through property taxes. In 2013, Pierce County Library earned the coveted [National Medal for Museum and Library Service](#) award.