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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Aw, man. She is fantastic. She'll be a tough act to follow.

Nice work using her words to tell the story. I moved a chunk (now starting at line 59) to more fluidly explain the shifting of the trends.

Line 21 — I fixed a lot of info about this book. If Starr wonders why any of it was changed, I can elaborate.

Line 26 — If they really chose Brattleboro before the position opened, they wouldn't have come to make sure.

Line 179 — Susie Smallheer quoted Jerry Carbone in her Herald article about Read's bequest in 2013.

While double checking some things, I came across [this link](#). Starr's name is *Marina*? I knew it! I told Olga in 2015 when Starr was hired, "That's not a real name!" (To be fair, Olga reported from the Selectboard meeting that the new director's name was "Star Electronica.") But in a town with a Spoon, a Breeze, and a Vidda, she damn well can be a Starr.

**HEADLINE ELEMENTS:**

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 A chapter closes

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 Starr LaTronica will step down in April after a decade as  
3 Brattleboro's library director, having transformed Brooks  
4 Memorial Library 'from a place to a presence'

#####END SUBHED#####

5 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

6 For a decade, Brooks Memorial Library has been the  
7 front door of Brattleboro. Now the woman who flung open that  
8 door is leaving.

9 Starr LaTronica, 71, resigned as head librarian just before  
10 the new year. She will stay in her position until April, giving the  
11 town time to find her replacement.

12 LaTronica began as head librarian in Brattleboro in  
13 2016, after a long and successful career as a librarian in  
14 Binghamton, New York, where as the head librarian she managed  
15 a system encompassing 42 member libraries.

16 She has also served as chair of the John Newbery Medal  
17 committee, as a past president of the Association for Library  
18 Service for Children, a division of the American Library  
19 Association, and as a judge for the National Book Awards. She  
20 has helped decide the annual list of *The New York Times'* Best  
21 Illustrated Children's Books.

22 She is the namesake for Daniel Pinkwater's librarian  
23 character Starr Lakawanna in his book *Looking for Bobowicz*  
24 (HarperCollins: 2004), who utters the immortal lines "I live to  
25 astonish, amaze, and astound. Those are things librarians do  
26 well."

27 LaTronica and her husband, John, a builder, eyed  
28 Brattleboro as their community long before the head librarian  
29 position opened.

30 "When we knew this job was available, we started  
31 coming and hanging out more frequently to make sure we really  
32 like the town as much as we thought we did," LaTronica told *The*  
33 *Commons*. "I wouldn't tell them why I was asking, but I would  
34 ask everybody, 'So what do you think about the library?' And the  
35 worst thing anybody said to me was, 'I really should go more.'

36        "Well, I thought, *This is a great place to be a librarian.*  
37    And I was not wrong. It was.  
38        "The community is so incredibly responsive and so  
39    supportive. Even those people that don't come to the library, they  
40    still support the library because they understand that it's for the  
41    public good."

## 42        **Dealing with change**

43        LaTronica arrived in Brattleboro just as libraries were on  
44    the cusp of major changes.

45        They have always been a welcoming place, offering their  
46    communities free information, knowledge, and a quiet place to  
47    read.

48        But the internet was changing everything.

49        Card catalogs disappeared. Google offered easy  
50    searching of the world's knowledge at your fingertips; Wikipedia  
51    emerged as an enormous crowdsourced encyclopedia. You no  
52    longer had to sit and read a book by hand; you could listen while  
53    running on a treadmill.

54        Meanwhile, bookstores went under. Banking went  
55    online. Medicine went online. States and the federal government  
56    followed. Magazines went online. So did television.

57        Suddenly, one of the most important services the library  
58    could offer was its public internet connection.

59        Yet, as the world grew into the internet age, LaTronica  
60    has seen how people have realized technology's limitations and  
61    came back to the library.

62        "Luckily, people realize now that not everything that you  
63    see on the internet can be trusted, and so they have come back to  
64    the library to get the expertise of the best reference librarian I've  
65    ever worked with, Jeanne Walsh," she said.

66        "Also, children's service libraries never fell away,  
67    because that is really the heart of the library," she added. "Parents  
68    always recognize that."

69           That's because "the socialization kids get, the agency  
70       they get, that they can come in, they can choose books, and a  
71       parent doesn't have to worry about the price of the book or  
72       anything — it's one of the first places that kids can make their  
73       own decisions, which is a great thing," LaTronica said.

74           The children's department also offers group experiences,  
75       "like story time, where parents learn songs and finger plays and  
76       rhymes to do with their kids, and kids develop social skills by  
77       being in a group," she continued. "Kids' services always kept  
78       libraries afloat, even in that messy time when the people thought  
79       the internet was going to solve everything."

## 80           **'That's sharing'**

81           When LaTronica began her work at Brooks, libraries  
82       were being threatened by powerful interests. The Heritage  
83       Foundation and other right-wing organizations have for years  
84       funded and coordinated a movement to slash library funding  
85       from town budgets, effectively privatizing or closing them.

86           This was an effort that she especially frowned upon.  
87           "What makes libraries great is that they are for  
88       everybody," LaTronica said. "They are the public good."

89           Once, she said, she was talking to a group of  
90       preschoolers about libraries, "and I explained how they worked  
91       and how everybody gives money through their taxes, and then  
92       we buy things, and then everybody borrows them, and then they  
93       bring them back."

94           "That's sharing," one little girl told LaTronica.

95           Nationally, censorship also reared its ugly head.

96           "It depends on where you are in the country," LaTronica  
97       said. "That's why I'm a really lucky librarian to be in this in this  
98       community. This community is a protection against some of the  
99       more horrible strains of anti-humanity going on in the rest of the  
100       country. Luckily, we have not had challenges to materials here."

101 She said there has been only one challenge during her  
102 tenure, and “that was a misunderstanding” on the part of the  
103 complainant.

104 “She hadn’t read the book,” LaTronica said. “She  
105 misunderstood the title and thought it was about something else.  
106 So that got cleared up in a hurry.”

107 Other than “some complaints around programming that  
108 we did several years ago,” community support for the collection  
109 and for those programs “was overwhelming,” she said.

## 110 **Keeping a good thing going**

111 The retirement of Brooks’s former head librarian, Jerry  
112 Carbone, opened the doors for LaTronica as his successor. She  
113 credits his leadership for building a library that was widely  
114 respected and appreciated by its town and the region.

115 Carbone, widely loved in the community, “left me with  
116 just a fantastic staff and such a solid reputation in the community,  
117 that everybody already loved and supported the library,”  
118 LaTronica said. “I couldn’t do what I’ve done here in a lot of  
119 other communities. This community, which is what made me  
120 want to move here, is just so unique and so engaged in the  
121 common good.”

122 She believes that spirit has made her 10-year-long tenure  
123 so successful.

124 “It’s been my experience in this community that so many  
125 people are engaged in efforts, whether they’re volunteers,  
126 whether they’re activists, whether they’re leaders or  
127 employees of not-for-profits, or if they’re just residents, they are  
128 working towards the common good,” LaTronica said.

129 “Even when we find ourselves on opposite sides of  
130 opinions, there’s a sense that I get from this community that we  
131 care about the town and we want the town to be as good as it  
132 can be. That’s what I love, and that’s the kind of support and  
133 benefit I’ve received from this community. It’s an encouragement

134 and inspiration. People know one another. They know one  
135 another's names. You don't see that everywhere."

136 From the beginning, the electric LaTronica threw herself  
137 into the community. There was seemingly not a social service  
138 organization whose board she did not join, not an art show or  
139 meeting she did not attend, not a homeless person whose name  
140 she did not know, and a connection to the library that she did not  
141 tie down.

142 "My goal was to just inform and educate and inspire  
143 everybody to use this incredible resource," she said. "It's at their  
144 fingertips. If you think that this library doesn't have something for  
145 you, then please — I'm inviting you to come in. I'll find  
146 something for you in this library."

147 Today, Brooks is as much a community center as a  
148 library. You can borrow passes to most of the nearby museums.  
149 You can check out snowshoes or cooking equipment or an  
150 electric bicycle from Brooks' Library of Things. You can listen to  
151 legislators explain their goals for the year. You can hear authors  
152 speak about their latest books.

153 In LaTronica's own words, she has moved the library  
154 from being "a place to a presence."

155 "I made an effort to really go out," Latronica said. "I went  
156 to the [Brattleboro] Farmers' Market, to the table at the  
157 [Brattleboro Food] Co-op. Everybody I talked to in the town knew  
158 I was a librarian. That is my identity. So people really came to  
159 think of the library as the place if they wanted an event, if they  
160 wanted to have a meeting, if they wanted some kind of program.  
161 They would think, 'Oh, the library should do that.' And now I  
162 really see it as the pulse of the community."

## 163 **'You see everything'**

164 LaTronica waves a hand from her seat behind a giant  
165 computer in her office on the mezzanine, down to the main  
166 reading room below.

167       “You can really see what’s going on here,” she said. “You  
168       can see the folks that are hanging out here. You see everything.”

169       She describes that scene on the library main floor as “a  
170       microcosm of the community.”

171       “Folks are coming and doing art for a while. People are  
172       coming here and working on puzzles. You see people with  
173       disabilities and people who are aging, and some people that I  
174       think maybe staying here all day because their house is cold,”  
175       LaTronica said.

176       The library, she continued, is “a place where people  
177       come to be around other people, and there aren’t that many  
178       places that you can just come and be around other people.  
179       Sometimes we’ll have two people playing Scrabble at a table  
180       downstairs.”

181       Shortly before LaTronica’s arrival, the town learned of a  
182       surprising \$1.2 million bequest to the library by Ronald Read, a  
183       retired gas station attendant and janitor who had secretly  
184       amassed wealth through stock market investing. He also left \$4.8  
185       million to Brattleboro Memorial Hospital.

186       The library’s two small meeting rooms on its mezzanine  
187       — in such heavy demand they are usually booked all day —  
188       were part of a renovation of the library building using the Read  
189       bequest.

190       “We never could have done that without him,” LaTronica  
191       said. “People are tutoring or having a chess lesson or having a  
192       Zoom call or something. They’re always busy, you know.”

193       The library also got a teen reading room, which replaces  
194       “a little movable shelf in the middle of the adult reading room,  
195       which is not a place to hang out.”

196       The new space is called the “Spicy Lime.”

197       “That’s the name the teens voted for,” LaTronica said.  
198       “The teens get to have some agency there, so that’s what they  
199       picked. I’m really, really proud of the room. It’s a special place  
200       for teens.

201        "And every time there's a youth council meeting or any  
202        gathering of teens, and they talk about where are safe, or about  
203        good places for teens to go in the community, they always  
204        mention the library. And that's because they have their own  
205        space, and that wouldn't have been the case before," she  
206        continued.

## 207        **What's next?**

208        Will it surprise anyone that while LaTronica is leaving  
209        Brooks, she has no intention of ever giving up being a librarian?

210        "I can't imagine ever stopping work," she said. "I can't  
211        imagine not being a librarian. I've been a librarian longer than  
212        I've been a wife or a mother. So I intend to work until they haul  
213        me away feet first."

214        LaTronica says she wants to return to working with youth  
215        — her professional speciality prior to her roles in top  
216        management.

217        "And that's really where my heart is, and that's where my  
218        expertise is," she said. "So I miss the candor of kids. There's no  
219        better way to fight cynicism than to work with children. They're  
220        just the hope of the world, and I have a blast with them, and they  
221        get my jokes, darn it."

222        The LaTronicas have three children: a son and twin  
223        daughters. One of her daughters, Ramona, 32, is a school  
224        librarian in Turners Falls, Massachusetts.

225        "I can really spend some time there and do some fun  
226        things with kids," LaTronica said. "I'm going to ask her to let me  
227        volunteer there. Actually, I'm going to make her let me  
228        volunteer."

229        So, after a decade, it is time for Brooks to have another  
230        library director.

231        "Jerry Carbone said that it is a transformational moment  
232        that occurs when a library gets a new director," LaTronica said.  
233        "I'm so grateful that I was able to contribute my vision and to  
234        make some changes and bring some new things along. And now I

235 think it's time for somebody else to come in and freshen things  
236 up.

237 "I've been here 10 years. It's time for somebody to come  
238 in with another vision, with another perspective, and it's only  
239 going to be better," LaTronica said. "It's absolutely only going to  
240 be better."

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