

STARK COUNTY

Meet Mary Ellen Icaza, CEO and executive director of Stark Library

Patricia Faulhaber Special to the Canton Repository

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Mary Ellen Icaza is the CEO and executive director of Stark Library. She considers her work a calling.

“Literacy is central to the work we do, and I believe wholeheartedly that it leads to success in life,” she said. “I am honored to lead an organization that works each and every day to serve our community.”

She is passionate about the work she and her team do at the Stark Library, which has a mission to strengthen the community by advancing literacy, connecting people and encouraging exploration.

Icaza graduated from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and received her master of library science degree from the University of Maryland at College Park. She lives in Plain Township with her husband Javier, and son Christian and daughter Victoria. The family dog is a cheagle named Marcie.

“I’ve worked in public libraries, communications, and government consulting,” Icaza said. “Before moving to Stark County, I lived and worked in the D.C. metro area for 20 years. I was the assistant director of programs and outreach at Montgomery County Public Libraries in Rockville, Maryland, prior to becoming the CEO and executive director of Stark Library in the summer of 2018.

“The quality of life attracted my family to Stark County. After many years of living in a major metropolitan area, we were drawn to living and working in a smaller community. We have enjoyed living here and have appreciated the lack of traffic congestion and the warmth and friendliness of new friends.”

5 questions with Joylnn Bishop Woofter: Advance math and science teacher at Perry Local Schools

What is the best part of leading the Stark County District Library system?

The best part of leading the library is being able to contribute to the community in a meaningful way, whether it be working with community partners to connect people with resources and services, providing books to young children, teaching people how to use technology, or giving people access to books and materials.

I love the connections that we can make with people and the difference we can make in someone's life.

Have you always had an interest in reading and what are some of your favorite genres of books to read?

I have had an interest in reading ever since I got my first library card as a 7-year-old. My favorite genres are fiction — romance, historical fiction and fantasy.

Would you share some of your favorite memories of visiting a library during your elementary or high school years?

I have many memories of using the library throughout my school years. The library has always been a place of importance for me.

When I was in elementary school, I participated in the summer reading program at my library, and I remember going to summer programs and talking to the librarian about the books I read. I also remember riding my bike there with my friend to pick up new books together.

In junior high, my mother drove my siblings and me to the neighborhood shopping center where the bookmobile was parked on a weekly basis. In high school, I have memories of studying at the library after school with my friends.

What are some of your favorite activities to do during your downtime?

I enjoy reading (or course), binge-watching TV shows, crocheting, playing pickleball, and spending time with family and friends.

One for fun: Do you like surprises?

I do not like surprises because I like to know what's coming and not be caught off-guard. I am a planner. However, in a book, I do appreciate an unexpected twist in a storyline that I was not expecting!

Editor's note: Five questions with ... is a Sunday feature that showcases a member of the Stark County community. If you'd like to recommend someone to participate, send an email to newsroom@cantonrep.com.