

Sun

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July 2013 | thesunmag.com



Mrs.
Maryland
Heather
Ziehl

Boston
bombing
survivor
Erika
Brannock
(center)



Baltimore
Mayor
Stephanie
Rawlings-
Blake

SPECIAL ISSUE

50 WOMEN TO WATCH

The most intriguing, powerful and memorable personalities
making an impact on the Baltimore region



KARL MERTON FERRON

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Valerie J. Gross

52, CEO and president, Howard County Library System

Valerie J. Gross says she's always happy to go to her job as CEO and president of Howard's library system. But when she got a phone call early one morning in June, telling her the system had been named 2013 Library of the Year by Library Journal, well, that was really something to get excited about.

"Talk about a great day at work — finding out you've received the most prestigious honor among libraries in the U.S., Canada and Mexico," she said. "The best part was seeing the pride of the people, the whole team who contributed to this."

Q&A

What's a fact about you that will surprise people?

"I'm trained as an opera singer."

Find more Q&A at thesunmag.com

Gross, of Columbia, has been at the helm of the library system since 2001, overseeing six libraries that serve a population of nearly 300,000.

During her tenure, she has seen the library system and its influence expand. The system spearheaded the county's "Choose Civility" campaign, which has spread across the country. The system has grown physically, too: The construction of the state-of-the-art Miller Branch in Ellicott City was completed last year.

Items borrowed annually have reached 7.1 million. That is the highest borrowing-per-capita in the state, Gross said, and is a testament to the importance of education in the county, of which the library system is a major part.

"Education is timeless," she said. "It's the solution to the world's problems. ... The value we place on this takes us back to our roots as a library system, with a 21st-century approach: education for everyone."

Gross' passion and commitment are "infectious," County Executive Ken Ulman said.

"I love talking about how great our libraries are, and Valerie is an important reason why," he said. "And as the parents of two young girls, we are constant users of Howard County's libraries, and get to see first-hand the accomplishments Valerie and her team have achieved."

— Sara Toth