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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nick Demske Appointed Permanent Executive Director of Racine Public Library

Thursday, July 18, 2024 (Racine, WI) — Effective July 17, Nick Demske has accepted an offer from the board of the Racine Public Library to become the library’s permanent executive director. Demske transitions into this role after a 17-year career with the library, most recently serving since July 2023 as the library’s interim executive director.

“On behalf of the Racine Public Library board of trustees, I am so very pleased to announce that we have officially hired Nick Demske as our permanent executive director!” writes Brian O’Connell, president of the library board. “We look forward to working with Nick as the library turns the page to this new chapter, and I’m positive that the story will be a good one. I’m proud of Nick, and I’m confident in his leadership.”

Demske’s work with the library began in early 2007. Prior to applying, Demske used the library as a workspace and a warming shelter. At the time, he had no permanent address, so he came to the library to complete job applications. One day, a library teammate added an application for a circulation opening to Demske’s stack; shortly after, he joined the team of the Racine Public Library. When he thinks back to this time, Demske describes himself as a “living success story of libraries.”

After some time in circulation, Demske transitioned into a role as a youth services librarian. It was here that the families frequenting his storytimes began to call Demske by the fond title of “library Nick.” Later, Demske stepped into a position as Racine’s community resource librarian. During this time, he earned his Master’s in Library and Information Science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, a degree sponsored in part by the library’s continuing education endowment. Then, in late 2021, Demske became the library’s first deputy director.

Demske brings a focus on equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and anti-racism to his career, particularly in the fields of transformative justice and sustainability. This includes work such as helping to build the first Participatory Defense Hub in the country to be housed at a library, founding the BONK! Arts and Culture series, hosting the annual Mary Finley and Marcie Eanes Black History Month Read-In, and planting the seeds that would become the Racine Public Library’s literal “seed library.” His EDI and anti-racism efforts also included a push for increasingly inclusive hiring practices. For example, Demske has advocated to no longer require a master’s in library science for the majority of the library’s positions, observing that it was a barrier to introducing teammates of color, and Racine community members in general, to the building and the librarianship field.

When asked about his approach to leadership, Demske responds that if you want to accomplish remarkable things, leadership needs to be shared. “The library’s leadership team, management team, and entire staff is visionary in terms of what a library can and should be. I’m so grateful to those helping lead and run the library. So much more is possible for us because of their

leadership, to the point that people from libraries across the country have asked our guidance on how we do what we do.”

Now that he has been appointed, Demske envisions an early next step to be engaging staff and stakeholders in a new strategic planning process. “We’ve got no shortage of great ideas for new and better ways to serve the community, and a strategic planning process will help us prioritize and put a timeline to those goals,” says Demske. He also plans to continue cultivating support for the Racine Public Library. “We have a world-class team guiding this library, so my role is to support them in the amazing work they do and galvanize our community to do the same. I hope to inspire the whole community to build this library’s capacity and impact so we can change and uplift more and more lives every day.”

“The Racine Public Library has changed the whole trajectory of my life, and it has been the foundation for everything I’ve ever contributed to this community,” Demske shares. “I want to realize the library’s power to have the same impact for the countless others whose lives are intertwined with this institution.”



The Racine Public Library’s mission is to lift up the lives of the people of the Racine community by embracing community diversity, promoting inclusion, creating opportunity and by supporting the development of community literacy through a love of literature, learning and civic engagement. Located on the beautiful shores of Lake Michigan, the library first opened its doors in 1897 and has served the community from its 75th Street location since 1958.