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We Love Libraries!

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We Love LIBRARIES!

Pinewoods Model of Service

by Kathryn Ames

The Pinewoods Library and Community Learning Center, a branch of the Athens Regional Library System, is unique in that it was funded by a 2004 grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services [IMLS]. This 3-year National Leadership Grant was the result of collaboration between the Library and its partner, the Lyndon House Arts Center. Nationally, the program was a finalist for Library Journal's Best Small Library in America in 2009, won the Highsmith Library Innovation Award sponsored by the Public Library Association in 2007, and was awarded the Dorothy Mullen Award by the National Recreation and Park Association in 2008. It continues to be a model of successful programming.

Rapid growth of the Hispanic community first brought this community to the library's attention. As more families migrated to the area because of jobs in the poultry, construction and landscaping industries, library staff began to encounter more people in need of basic library services. The library first began by offering various storytelling events, films for young adults, and conversational English classes. As the demand for services grew, the staff began looking to other opportunities. Harmonic convergence occurred! The Lyndon House Arts Center was experiencing the same growth in their programs. Eventually, this proposal was created:

Goals for the project included:

1. Improve the educational level of the immigrant Mexican population;
2. Increase use of the Library and Arts Center through targeted programming, collection development, and staff training; and
3. Provide opportunities for educational and cultural exchange.

The partners proposed a library facility to be housed in a double-wide classroom trailer located in the Pinewoods Mobile Home Park in North Athens where

a concentration of Hispanics lives. The building is outfitted with 16 computers, wireless access, a classroom, an art area, and traditional library materials. The library offers computer instruction, English as a Second Language classes, afterschool tutorial programs, art classes, citizenship information, Plaza Comunitaria and GED classes, and other relevant programming. Health issues are some of the most popular on-going series. Professionals from the community discuss topics ranging from diabetes to high blood pressure, inoculations children need before attending school, Alzheimer's, and dental services. At least one person says the library saved her life—she had extremely high blood sugar and did not have enough nutritional information to help control it. A nurse-educator from the hospital and a nutritionist assisted with several programs.

Overall, this project which continues today with local funding support, has been a huge success, far beyond our initial expectations. The library has become the hub for information about the Hispanic community and its activities in Northeast Georgia, serving as a one-stop information center. Partnerships from the community not only helped develop the proposal, but enabled the library system to continue developing library and arts programming. There is a 9-member citizen's advisory board that has assisted in planning the activities of the library. Representatives to the board have included residents of Pinewoods, service organizations, and local businesses. The University of Georgia has three departments that offer significant support—the College of Education Center for Latino Achievement and Success, the Office of International Public Service and Outreach, and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute. Other departments such as Romance Languages have also contributed students and advice.

The Pinewoods Library offers a unique afterschool program with UGA students volunteering to tutor children. These children often possess language skills that their parents do not have, but lack some of the

basic skills, particularly in reading and math. Tutors work with the students to master the concepts behind some of their schoolwork and have been successful in helping children achieve higher test scores as a result of the additional work. Tutors often find the experience life-altering and many return as volunteers for several years as a result; several have changed the emphasis of their majors as well.

Partnerships within the community have helped the Library and Arts Center to build trust. The library staff was already known to some of the mobile home park residents [220 mobile homes and approximately 1000 people] prior to locating a facility. We had worked with the Oasis program for several years and knew some of the community leaders. Having a native speaker as the first Manager also was a key component. The Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs have continued to support the library with funds for additional software and materials purchases.

The Lyndon House Arts Center has been a wonderful partner. One of the most successful programs has been the cultural exchange effort. Families from the program are transported to the center for art displays, programming, music events and festivals. Casa de la Cultura is a group of local Hispanic women from Pinewoods (and now expanded to include people from other communities) who create and market indigenous art. This led to seminars about opening local business and eventually to the development of an Hispanic bakery and restaurant. We were also able to host an “artist in residence” program with glass etching artist Berta Murrieta and painter/photographer Fernando Meza for a week. During their time in Athens, they visited schools, hosted an exhibit of Mexican art and photography, offered classes on photography and on family history for Pinewoods, and spoke to civic groups. Later, a small contingent visited museums and libraries in several parts of Mexico.

Staff and library board training continues to be an area of effort. Few of either the library or museum staff speak Spanish; we offered basic conversational Spanish classes for all public service staff. We have translated all brochures and signage into Spanish. We normally take all full-time staff members on a tour of the region so that they are aware of the diversity of services available. The Library Board meets at Pinewoods every two years. Our manager has spoken at staff training days and makes occasional reports to the Board. However, this remains an area for improvement. Statistics indicate that this program has been well-used. Other performance measures such as employability of people coming through some of the educational programs also demonstrate success.

One music group, now in great demand locally, got

its start at the Pinewoods Library. A student of the computer classes and the ESL program received her GED, enrolled in tech school, and found a well-paying position with a community service agency. Others have gone on to enroll in other programs, form businesses, and to begin to be more acculturated within the Athens community.

Lessons learned from this program include the need to build strong partnerships, to be clear about the goals of the project, and to build awareness within the community. While immigration is a huge issue on the state and national level, we have been fortunate that this program has not been a flashpoint for that discussion locally; it has been accepted and supported. The program has evolved over the years as community needs have changed. We originally relied on volunteers to teach ESL. With the help of an American Dream grant, sponsored by ALA and Dollar General Store, we have been able to promote the library and its programs, and we now have a paid teacher working with students. More and more families need access to employment information and our program now provides not only job information, but classes about interviewing and resume preparation as well as offering basic computer skills.

This model of service has been replicated in several states. For more information, the webpage at www.clarke.public.lib.ga.us includes reports and photos of the project.

PINWOODS STATISTICS			
	2006	2011	Growth
Circulation	7,512	18,963	152.44%
Patron Count	13,889	22,386	61.18%
Reference Questions	5,909	20,543	247.66%
Computer Use	9,337	12,837	37.49%
Children’s Attendance	2,648	8,485	220.43%
Volunteers	799	1,321	65.33%

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