



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Libraries must begin to reflect the changing face of the American population. To accomplish this demands the intelligence, compassion, tolerance, and understanding that we cannot build a great community, country or profession without including everyone in the construction process. It is the promise of this country.”

-From “Library Services to Latinos,” by Sal Guerena

I didn't start out wanting to be a librarian. I actually spent my childhood thinking I would either be a supreme court justice or a doctor – which I guess goes to show my parents did a good job of letting me know women can choose the same jobs as men. My gradual interest in staying in library work evolved from working in the Alameda County library system, starting as a clerk, then a librarian assistant and, finally, a librarian. But I can't help wondering whether I would have chosen this kind of work earlier if librarians I knew, or one of my teachers, had encouraged me to.

So, when I came across some articles about librarian recruitment, I was interested to see what they had to say. First, according to a piece by Chris Newmarker on a site called Phillyburbs.com, by the year 2010 about 45 percent of current librarians will reach retirement age. That leaves a lot of jobs open for up-and-coming librarians, and Newmarker describes

the intensive library recruitment now going on in New Jersey, with some support money coming from the state.

But another kind of library recruitment that has been in existence for many years is the effort to get more minorities into the profession. In fact, in 2004, the American Library Association (ALA) Office for Diversity received a \$928,142 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Some of this money will go toward the Spectrum Scholarship, which was established in 1997 to “address the under-representation of critically needed ethnic librarians within the profession while serving as a model for ways to bring attention to larger diversity issues in the future” (ALA website).

The Spectrum Scholarship provides one-year scholarships, as well as professional development opportunities, like attending library conferences. The Florida Library Association (FLA) has a minority recruit-

ment committee, as well, and one of their goals is to “increase the awareness of the libraries in Florida of the need to recruit minorities to provide a future pool of information professionals who reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of Florida” (FLA website).

The question some might ask is: Why is this particularly necessary? Can’t any good librarian provide library service to any person? What difference should it make how ethnically and culturally diverse librarians are?

The answer to this is similar to the reason affirmative action is a good idea. It’s not just about that one person – it is about an ever-growing circle of people. Having a Latino librarian, for instance, in a small community public library will not just impact the library patrons who go to the reference desk. It will impact the Latino children and young adults who

may say to themselves: “I could also be a librarian.” It will impact the environment of the library, both for the public and for the staff. It will draw in library patrons who may feel unsure of their welcome because their culture or language is different than the majority of their community. It will tell the community the library is committed to the idea that diversity is good and appropriate and welcomed.

Having a diverse library staff is like dropping a small pebble in a lake and watching the circles of water as they ripple outward. It is a powerful yet subtle act and a lesson worth remembering for any profession.