



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The mission of the ALA Public Programs Office is to foster cultural programming as an integral part of library service in all types of libraries. The unit provides leadership, resources, training, and networking opportunities that help thousands of librarian nationwide develop and host cultural opportunities for adults, young adults, and families.”

-From American Library Association website
(www.ala.org)

I recently received an email about the American Library Association’s Cultural Communities Fund (CCF). The librarian who sent it encouraged librarians and others to support this fund, particularly because there is a July 31, 2005, deadline for receiving matching funds from the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH).

To find out more about this, I went to the ALA website. CCF turns out to be part of the ALA Public Programs office and it is described as “an endowment to support local libraries... as they develop and create cultural programs.” The focus of this new fund is to provide a permanent and ongoing funding source. Specific activities, according to the CCF fact sheet, will include training for librarians, program models, and programming grants.

Some of the supporters of this fund include: the NEH; the Wallace Foundation; the Public Library Association;

HarperCollins Publishers; the National Library of Medicine; and many individuals. It is wonderful to see people actively supporting the idea of “bringing communities together through cultural programming” (ALA website).

And what are some of the specific programs ALA provides? On the website I found two current available grants: “Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation” – a traveling exhibit which will go to 60 libraries – and, “Let’s Talk About It: Jewish Literature – Identity and Imagination” – a reading and book discussion program. I also looked to see whether any nearby libraries have received past grants from the PPO and found several. Berkeley Public Library, as well as Richmond and San Francisco, were chosen as sites for the “Human Rights Video Project,” which was “dedicated to increasing the public’s awareness of human rights issues through the med-

ium of documentary films.” Each grant included a collection of 12 films, and some libraries received additional funding for discussion groups.

In 2004, the Benicia Public Library hosted something called “Listening to the Prairie: Farming in Nature’s Image,” which was a traveling exhibition that took a close look at the central agricultural region of North America. And I was involved in the Albany Library grant a few years ago for a program called “LIVE! @ Your Library,” which provided the funds to host a series of poetry events. This series was so popular there are now two ongoing poetry programs at the library.

There is a page on the ALA website that describes the benefits of public programming for libraries and their communities – and it is worth reading. But I can attest to these benefits myself. Even on the days when I just want to go home from

work and relax – even on those days – I am moved or exhilarated or entertained by the programs we have at our library.

This summer I have seen the results of all the planning and organizing and allocating I had to do in the spring, as I prepared for our Tuesday evening summer events. So far, they have all been well attended and as good as I could hope. And when I stand at the back of the room and watch the children laughing at Swazzle and their puppets or hear the rhythmic clapping as the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers give us history and music in action, I am most aware of influencing not the crowd of 80 or more, but each individual person, as they find something that is special to them. That is what public programming is about.