



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Collaboration is a choice. It can’t be mandated. It’s hard work. It’s fragile... Collaborations require mutual respect, trust, mentoring and humor.”

-From Lizabeth A. Wilson’s “Collaborate or Die: Designing Library Space” (www.arl.org/newsltr/222/collabwash.html)

I recently realized that two of the programs we currently have at the Albany Library are collaborations with other agencies. Since this has been a concept on my mind ever since I attended an Infopeople workshop about it, I was happy to see that it is something we are actively doing.

One of the benefits of collaboration is the potential for a larger and more diverse audience. Another is the opportunity to get new ideas – especially about the kinds of programs. I have seen both of these effects in our current collaborations and I have found it exciting to be a part of both of them.

This past week, I had a chance to see both collaborations in action. On Monday, we had our third Brown Bag Speakers Forum, which is a collaboration between the Albany Library and the Albany YMCA. These Forums are held at the Library once a month on a Monday, from 12:30 to 1:30, and they include a speaker, followed by a question-and-answer

period. The first one was the author Theodore Roszak and there was a huge turnout, at least in part because he is so well-known. The second one was Albany’s new police chief, Mike McQuiston, who gave a wonderful talk on community policing. The third one, on October 23, was Lisa Harris, who talked about the program Reading for Life, which helps prepare jail inmates for life outside jail.

Although the audiences for the second two were much smaller than for Roszak, each event was a valuable experience for those who attended. I was particularly moved by Lisa Harris’ talk, since I spent many years working in the jails – both as a jails librarian and as an assistant for the jail tutoring program. Lisa’s steady commitment to improving the lives of released prisoners and her practical approach to the many challenges of this work were inspiring, and I could tell by the questions afterward that members of the audience were

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struck by the importance of her work. As I listened and watched, I was proud to be part of a library that is committed to bringing programs to its community.

The next two Forums are scheduled for November 6 and December 11. November’s speaker, Angela Mason from World Vision, will talk about the critical importance of clean water. In December, Michelle Barger, a conservator of objects at the Museum of Modern Art, will address the challenges of conserving contemporary art.

The other collaboration this week was the film part of the Albany Reads series. This city-wide reading program focuses on Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, a novel about a man who spends his early childhood in Afghanistan, then moves to Fremont, California. The Albany Community Center, the Albany Unified School District, the Friends of the Albany Library and the Albany

Library have all worked together to create this series, which has so far included a book discussion group, a children’s photography workshop, and the heartwrenching film *Osama*.

The final event, on November 5, will be a talk by Humaira Ghilza and Elsie De Laere, from the Afghan Friends Network. Photographs, taken by young local photographers, will also be on display.

Libraries of all kinds participate in these kinds of collaborative programs. University librarians work with faculty, school librarians work with teachers, public librarians work with community agencies or even with each other. They are not easy, since representatives from each agency must commit to meeting, discussing, listening to each other, doing the work and compromising. The results, though, are rich and diverse programs that benefit everyone.