



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Focusing recruitment efforts on the staff of urban public libraries is an effective way to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of New Jersey’s librarians.”

-From the 2007 American Library Association (ALA) presentation: “Move ‘em Up: Developing a Workforce to Serve Our Communities.”

Last year I described a program I attended at the 2006 Public Library Association (PLA) conference. The Urban Library Program (ULP) is a collaboration between the Saint Paul Public and Minneapolis Public Libraries and the College of St. Catherine in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Their mission statement does a perfect job of summing up the purpose of the program: “To recruit and educate a diverse library workforce using theory and hands-on work experiences in libraries throughout the community.”

This year when I attended the ALA conference in Washington D.C., I came across two similar programs with the same objective. The first was at a presentation called “Move ‘Em Up: Developing a Workforce to Serve Our Communities.” Their stated goal is to “Recruit library staff for New Jersey’s urban public libraries,” based on the premise that “Current urban library staff [are] more likely to stay.” Like the ULP, they are funded

through a successful IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) grant. Their first grant was in 2003 and it was spread across 20 people. Ten of them were given free tuition and mentoring as they worked toward a bachelor’s degree; nine were given tuition, paid time off every week and mentoring as they attended an MLIS (Masters of Information and Library Science) program at Rutgers University; and one received tuition and a stipend as she worked toward a PhD.

They learned a lot in the first round and with their second grant they have made some changes. This time they have included five students who are working toward an Associate’s degree (AA), and they are providing GRE (Graduate Record Exam) training for any employee who wants it. The GRE was a bigger hurdle than anticipated and it is a requirement for admission to the Rutgers MLIS program. Paid time off also turned out to be much more important than

continued on page 2

they realized and so they have added it for everyone except the PhD student.

The program is a collaboration among five partners: the Central Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, the New Jersey Library Association; the New Jersey State Library; Rutgers SCILS; and Thomas Edison State College, which is an adult-learning online college.

This kind of commitment to the challenging task of creating a more diverse library staff is wonderful and I was sorry to see the poor attendance at their presentation. The issue is critical to the ability of libraries of all kinds to be able to provide the best services to their communities and the benefits are widespread. As Dr. Jane Varlejs from Rutgers commented: “When we enrich the pool of students, we enrich the faculty and the other students.”

As I walked through the ALA exhibit hall, I came across another program dedicated to

this idea. The LIS (Library and Information Science) Access Midwest Program (LAMP) is described in their brochure as: “A regional recruitment alliance committed to promoting careers in Library and Information Science.” One of their stated goals is to: “Encourage the participation of students from statistically and historically underrepresented populations,” and the program provides internships, financial support and mentoring.

Mentoring is an essential part of all these programs. The careful guidance and active support provided by someone in the profession can make all the difference. REFORMA has addressed this with their mentoring and recruitment committee, of which I am proud to be a member. Like these library school programs, our goal is to make it possible for more librarians to come from the ethnicities and cultures of the communities they serve.