



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“RESOLVED, that the American Library Association work with REFORMA and other affiliates to develop a public information strategy to inform and educate public libraries and member constituents about alternate forms of identification that will allow free public access to library services for ALL immigrant populations.”

-From “Resolution in Support of Immigrants’ Rights to Free Public Library Access” on the REFORMA website (www.reforma.org)

One of the organizations I belong to is REFORMA – the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking. I joined in 2004, and since then I have maintained my membership because, of all the emails I get daily, theirs are the most interesting and the most passionate. Their enthusiasm and commitment makes me feel like I am part of an organization that is doing important and socially conscious work – and I greatly appreciate what they do.

According to their website, REFORMA was established in 1971 as an affiliate of the American Library Association. Their goals include: Development of Spanish-language and Latino-oriented library collections; recruitment of bilingual, multicultural library personnel; promotion of public awareness of libraries and librarianship among Latinos; advocacy on behalf of the information needs of the Latino community; and, liaison to other professional

organizations.

Of all of those, I am most aware of two of them: advocacy and recruitment. A good example of advocacy is their Resolution quoted above, as well as their vigilance on such issues as English only initiatives. In 1985 they took a position that opposed a constitutional amendment proclaiming English as the official language. This was recently updated and is on their website as “REFORMA’s Position on Language Rights – Language Rights in the 21st Century.”

The language of this resolution is strong and clear and I find it comforting to read a document that so clearly shows their dedication to creating a more tolerant and accepting society. It is worth reading the whole piece, but to give an example: “REFORMA accepts the responsibility to alert the general public to the inherent dangers that may result from English only initiatives, including condescension to, racial profiling and victimization of

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the Spanish speaking and other non-English speaking peoples... REFORMA appreciates and defends the linguistic diversity and pluralism that strengthens American society...”

On the topic of recruitment, REFORMA is best known for an annual scholarship drive. This year’s five winners – who have all expressed an interest in working with Latinos – will each receive a \$1500 scholarship, to be used for library school. By providing these scholarships, REFORMA is helping not only these students, but also the communities they will eventually serve.

In addition, REFORMA supports the Pura Belpré Award, which is “presented to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth” (ala.org). Established in 1996, it is named after the first

Latina librarian from the New York Public Library. This year’s winners are Viola Canales for the narrative of *Tequila Worm* (a book I am currently reading and greatly enjoying), and Raul Colón for the illustrations in *Doña Flor: A Tall Tale About a Giant Woman with a Great Big Heart* (text by Pat Mora).

Resources on the REFORMA website include a list of U.S. public library websites with information in Spanish. This amazing document gives each library’s home page and then a brief description of their offerings. Forty states are included and reading down the list it is clear that libraries all over the United States – from California to Kansas to Arkansas to New York - are responding to their communities. They are all – as it is so well put in REFORMA’s language rights statement – committed to the idea that “libraries are beacons and gateways to immigrant populations...”