



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“When you invest in libraries it’s good for the community, it’s good for education, it’s good for the economy, and it’s good for families.”

-Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, quoted in Jennifer Burek Pierce’s article “Urban Libraries Council Conference: Place and Possibility; Chicago PL Showcases Vibrant Neighborhoods.” January 2006 *American Libraries*

I recently went to a presentation sponsored by the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) - an organization I had heard of but knew little about. Through some research, I found out much more about this association, which is dedicated to “strengthening the public library as an essential part of the urban life” (urbanlibraries.org).

They have broken their core purpose down into three areas: Members, Industry and Community. For members, they highlight the contributions their members make as they share best practices, provide professional development and help each other find resources and information. All of these points are relevant to my daily and ongoing involvement in the library world. Sharing best practices means staying in touch with people who are doing what I am doing - both in a small sense, like exchanging ideas for summer reading games, and in a larger sense, like discussing how the role of

the public librarian is changing. I experience professional development by attending workshops, trainings and conferences that help me grow as a librarian. And sharing resources means just that: whether it is by passing on the name of a good craft person or by working together to improve our library.

Next, industry: “ULC is developing ways to clearly measure and articulate what the public gets and how public library services and resources make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. It is also a place where library leaders collectively envision the future.” I find it comforting to know that as I participate every day in providing library services to my community, there is an ongoing examination of how and why what I do matters - and whether or not changes should be made. It is difficult to balance precedent, a library’s mission, and the immediate needs of those we serve, but

librarians and libraries are up to the challenge. ULC gives us an idea of how this can be accomplished.

And, finally, the public library’s role in the urban community. Librarians are encouraged to form partnerships with local and national agencies, thereby strengthening the library as well as the community. And libraries – because they serve such a diverse group of people – can bring together people who might not otherwise work together, as pointed out in a report on the ULC website (“Better Neighborhoods are Built When Libraries Step Out of Bounds”).

ULC uses a range of ways to support their core purpose. There are projects, such as the ULC Executive Leadership Institute, which trains future library leaders. Events include the presentation I attended at the 2006 Public Library Association conference

in Boston, called *Rub A Dub Dub: Three Library Systems in One Tub*, which I described in the March 31, 2006 column. And the February 2006 study tour of the new National Library of Singapore and the Central Library of Hong Kong included twenty ULC colleagues traveling together on a bus. There are awards, too. For instance, Lynn Lockwood of Baltimore County Public Library was recently awarded the 2006 “ULC/Sirsi Dynix Urban Player Award” for her leadership in supporting emergent literacy in her area.

As I gathered information about ULC – reading articles, looking at their website, experiencing one of their programs – I came away with such a good feeling. Their enthusiastic commitment to the ever-changing urban libraries is not only inspirational, it is also necessary in these times when library budgets are tight and

critical decisions need to be made.