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Volume 13  
Number 2  
*Finding Community: Civics, Cyberspace and  
Change (Summer 2007)*

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July 2014

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### Recommended Citation

Nelson, S. (2014). Multnomah County Library Champions Portland Zine Scene. *OLA Quarterly*, 13(2), 17-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1158>

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*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

# Multnomah County Library Champions Portland Zine Scene

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In 2005, Multnomah County Library created a stir in the Portland zine\* community when six librarians hosted a table in the exhibit hall at the three-day Portland Zine Symposium. Charter members of the library's Zine Library Group, the librarians had come together with a common interest: getting zines, independently produced publications, in the public library. The ZLG included a youth services librarian and two generalist reference librarians from Central Library, a branch reference librarian, a youth outreach librarian, and the library's teen services specialist. The group has recently expanded to include a manager from Central Library and two library assistants from branches.

## Portland Zine Symposium

Many symposium participants greeted the ZLG with surprise, asking questions about the library's role in the zine community. They also shared a great deal of enthusiasm and support and offered many positive comments, such as these:

Wow, the library is here! I love the library!

The Portland library is the best!

How can I get my zine in the library?  
I'm happy to donate it.

When is the library going to get zines?



The symposium helped the ZLG build connections with the local community, promote the library's upcoming *Zinesters Talking* lecture series, and gauge interest in a possible permanent collection of zines at the library.

The ZLG returned to the Portland Zine Symposium in 2006, again staffing a table in the exhibit hall and this time presenting "zines + libraries = luv," a workshop for library customers who want to encourage zines in their libraries. The workshop arms attendees with vocabulary and ideas for talking with public and school library staff about starting zine collections and programming.

## Zinesters Talking

In the fall of 2005, the ZLG presented *Zinesters Talking*, a series of three evening events at which local zinesters (zine authors) read from their works. The ZLG invited zinesters recommended by the librarian at Portland's Independent Publishing Resource Center and offered them an honorarium to speak. A different Multnomah County Library location hosted each event, and a local vegan grocery donated snacks for all of them. All events were held on a Tuesday or Wednesday.

The ZLG enlisted the library's in-house public relations department to help promote *Zinesters Talking* with flyers, a press release and exposure on the library Web site. To maximize exposure and community involvement, the ZLG also targeted some niche markets on its own, sending announcements to alternative news sources and community calendars. Local zinesters helped design flyers, and ZLG members hand-delivered publicity materials to area coffee shops, music stores, book and magazine shops, cafes, and other outlets. Delivering flyers



to local businesses gave ZLG members another opportunity to network within their communities. Because zinesters designed the flyers and increased their “cool factor,” other members of the zine community recognized the flyers more easily. Advertising in alternative media and in targeted external locations made the information about *Zinesters Talking* available to people who might not encounter it through the library’s usual PR efforts.

The 2005 *Zinesters Talking* series was very successful. The events drew from 20 to 60 people, at times leaving standing room only. The readers engaged the audience with creative presentations. Some used PowerPoint or slide shows to illustrate their readings, and one reader sang his zine with live musical accompaniment. Audience members appreciated the opportunity to purchase zines directly from the readers following the events, and they consistently responded with gratitude, positive feedback, and requests for similar events.

The library followed up *Zinesters Talking 2005* with an expanded *Zinesters Talking*

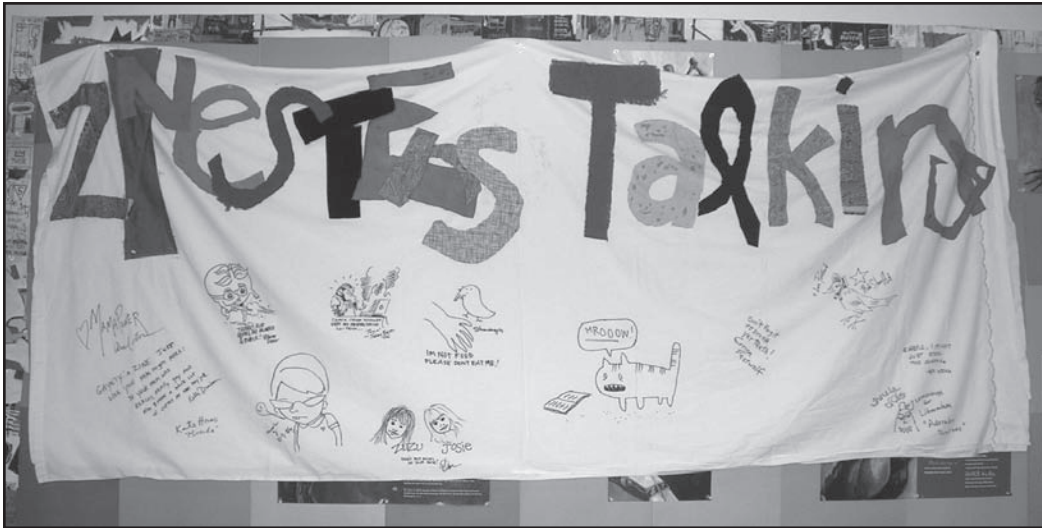
*2006*, a six-part series held at two locations. Attendance and enthusiasm continued to be high at the 2006 events. The final evening offered audience members a chance to read from their own zines. The ZLG is now preparing for *Zinesters Talking 2007*.

### Community Connections: IPRC and Microcosm

Two local organizations have been important partners with the library on zine projects. The Independent Publishing Resource Center ([www.iprc.org](http://www.iprc.org)) offers space and equipment to people who want to create and publish zines, as well as a circulating zine collection. The ZLG has worked closely with the IPRC librarian to promote events and solicit programming and collection suggestions. During spring break in 2005, the IPRC presented zine-making workshops for teens at several library locations. The library still offers this popular program.

Microcosm Publishing, a local zine distro (distributor) ([www.microcosmpublishing.com](http://www.microcosmpublishing.com)) has been another important





connection among zines, zinesters, and the library. The library purchases zines through Microcosm, and the ZLG has tapped Microcosm's employees for collection suggestions and potential *Zinesters Talking* readers. The ZLG organized two library showings of *\$100 and a T-Shirt: a Documentary about Zines in the Northwest*, a film created by Microcosm employees and Portland zinesters and distributed by Microcosm Publishing.

### **A Permanent Home for Zines at the Library**

After several years of hard work and successful programming, the ZLG attained its ultimate goal: a permanent home for zines at the library. In January 2007, the ZLG hosted a collection party at Central Library. Nearly 100 community members came to celebrate the new permanent collection, which is housed in the periodicals room at Central Library, as well as at five branch libraries. Zines are circulating well, and the

library gets regular customer requests for more zines. Zines fill gaps in the library's collection, present alternative viewpoints, and have created a link with the Portland zine community.

The ZLG is an excellent example of the outreach opportunities presented by fostering library employees' connections to and interests in the community. At Multnomah County Library, a group of librarians from different departments and locations had a common interest and saw a gap in the library's services. They used unconventional public relations tactics to advertise events and partnered with local businesses and organizations. Then they built upon the success of their outreach and programming to establish a permanent zine collection at the library. 🌿

\*For more information on what a zine is, see Multnomah County Library's Zines Web site: [www.multcolib.org/books/zines](http://www.multcolib.org/books/zines).

