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Community Collaborates for a Dia Celebration

Hope Crandall
Woodburn School District

Mary Parra
Woodburn School District

Deeda Chamberlain
Woodburn Public Library

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Community Collaborates for a Día Celebration

by Hope Crandall,
Mary Parra &
Deeda Chamberlain

Hope Crandall provides library services in English and Spanish at Washington Elementary School in Woodburn. She loves multicultural celebrations for all ages. Hope is a member of OASL, OLA, and REFORMA.

Mary Parra teaches information skills at Nellie Muir Elementary School in Woodburn, Oregon. She has also enjoyed working as Youth Services Librarian at Woodburn Public Library.

Deeda Chamberlain is the Youth Services Librarian at the Woodburn Public Library and a member of OLA. She enjoys collaborating with her excellent colleagues in the public schools to better serve the families of the Woodburn community.



Left to right: Mary Parra, Hope Crandall and Deeda Chamberlain.

The school gymnasium lies empty on a Saturday morning. Folding tables ring the outside of the floor. Lengths of vibrant *papel picado*, tissue paper cut in intricate designs, flutter from strings stretched across the ceiling. The room is quiet now but very soon will fill with the sounds of families exploring the many child-friendly activities offered at the tables. Chairs await the audience who will be entertained by local groups: gyrating break dancers, controlled martial arts students; the high school mariachi band; school district staff colorfully disguised as Mexican folk dancers; and exotically costumed Aztec dancers accompanied by the throbbing beat of drums.

Outside in the parking lot, emergency and public works staff gather to show their vehicles to the curious and admiring. In the nearby cafeteria, parent volunteers prepare an endless supply of popcorn and sno-cones in donated machines. Inside the gym children wait patiently at the most popular tables: the basketball throw sponsored by an insurance

group; the cake walk run by city recreation staff; the craft table operated by volunteers from the two Head Start schools, the fishing pond created and staffed by high school volunteers; and the library table where staff from two elementary libraries and the public library distribute free books to some 500 children. Periodically the cry, “Curious George!” follows the super-sized beloved character through the crowd.

The noise level rises as 950 family members and friends greet one another in three languages. The room vibrates with energy and laughter and the sounds of a community at play as Woodburn, Oregon celebrates its fourteenth annual Día de los Niños/Día de los Libros, Children’s Day/Book Day.

Since 1925 Children’s Days have been celebrated throughout the world. In 1996 author Pat Mora linked the celebration of children with literacy to create Día de los Niños/Día de los Libros, Children’s Day/Book Day, and designated



its date as the last Saturday in April.

Woodburn's Children's Day began in the mid-1990s as a small celebration by migrant families with the Woodburn School District. In the fall of 1999 a district administrator and two children's librarians, dreamed of expanding the celebration to include all families in Woodburn. The librarians, Mary Parra then at the public library, and Hope Crandall of Washington Elementary, proposed that the focus of the celebration be promoting family literacy. The Woodburn Public Library received a grant from Woodburn Together, a community based service organization, to purchase children's books to give away. In the fall of 2004 when Deeda Chamberlain, the new Youth Services Librarian, joined the planning committee, she augmented the Día budget with Ready to Read Grant funds.

Each autumn the steering committee, composed of the three librarians and a school district administrator, begins planning anew. The work of the committee includes identifying and inviting local organizations, agencies, businesses and other groups to participate by providing a youth activity, preferably literacy-oriented. Community members may also donate funds, services, or materials. Publicity, via newspaper, radio, library and school fliers, and a large street banner, has been very successful in building enthusiasm and attendance. In recent years, at request of the committee, both Woodburn City mayor Kathy Figley and Oregon Governor Kulongoski signed proclamations designating the last Saturday in April as Día de los Niños/Día de los Libros, Children's Day/Book Day.

Over the years, the librarians have organized a variety of activities: a professional storyteller, a clown, Clifford and Curious George costumes, coloring and designing bookmarks, library wheel of fortune, making literacy wristbands, fishing pond, writing and illustrating English and Spanish



"We never miss a year, that's why I have so many books!"

From a 5th grade student about the Día at which he has received a book a year.

proverbs, as well as matching kids with just the right free book

Many think of a Día celebration as an event for only Spanish-speaking families. In Woodburn Latino themes, decor, and entertainment dominate because Spanish speakers represent the largest portion of the community. However, as a celebration of both children and books, Día can be customized to fit any community size or ethnic configuration. The name of the game is collaboration. Initial collaborators might be school media specialists, principals, teachers, parent volunteers, public library directors, and youth services staff. Local service groups, like Rotary or Lions, may provide leadership or funding. The Ready to Read Grant can also serve as a source of funding for giveaway books for young children. Community partners such as schools, child care centers, businesses, faith organizations, health clinics, service organizations, social service agencies, local government departments, and local media may provide activities, supplies, publicity, or labor. Many of these organizations are looking for opportunities to connect to the community. A Día project is a perfect fit.

A Día event provides benefits to all collaborators and participants. Families benefit by an increase in community involvement which is very empowering for parents. The event recognizes the importance of children and makes them feel valued by their community. Community partners profit





“At the moment that we persuade a child to cross that threshold, that magic threshold into a library, we change their lives forever for the better.”


—Barack Obama

by educating families about their programs and agendas. Schools benefit by achieving their goal of supporting family literacy. By suggesting additional books, the librarians invite the families to visit all libraries and take advantage of the materials and children’s programs. For statistical purposes, including 950 participants in a grant request would undoubtedly help acquire additional

funds. Last but not least, a Día event creates community spirit because it’s more fun to work and play together!

Woodburn’s Día celebration continues to grow annually in scope, community involvement, and literacy focus. It has helped spawn a Sunday Día celebration in the city plaza sponsored by the downtown merchants, which also included distribution of free books. Next year the committee looks forward to expanding the Día celebration with community literacy efforts of the newly formed Woodburn Reads initiative. Other goals include recruiting more members for the on-going steering committee to strengthen the reading focus, to include a wider base of involvement, and to bring more planners and workers on board in the fall.

For a good overview of Día, see Pat Mora’s Web site:

<http://www.patmora.com/dia.htm> 



How to choose the *best* book.

