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Multnomah County Library Connects with Kids

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SCHOOL CORPS: PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP WITH K-12 SCHOOLS

The Multnomah County Library School Corps is an innovative outreach program that connects students and teachers with the critical information resources of the public library. Established in August 1997, it is the first of its kind in the nation in which library professionals are exclusively designated/assigned to promote public library resources in schools.

The goal of the School Corps is to increase information literacy of K-12 students in Multnomah County's nine school districts by working in partnership with local public and private schools. It aims to complement, not replace, media specialists. School Corps' public library service education continues to emphasize the necessity of media specialists in schools.

Five professional librarians work to support curriculum and increase student and faculty awareness and use of electronic information resources available through the public library. By working in cooperation with teachers, media specialists, and school library staff, the School Corps creates materials and services to assist students in the efficient and effective use of public library resources.

School Corps services include library card promotions and training in the Library's technology resources, including the Library's computer catalog, text-based Magazines Online and web-based SearchBank article databases, and the Library's web resources. The team also creates customized bibliographies, webliographies (annotated lists of web sites), pathfinders, and Internet scavenger hunts.

In its first year, School Corps sponsored two successful library card campaigns in which 68,680 K-12 students and faculty participated: *The Great Library Card Adventure* for grades K-5 and *Get Carded!* for middle and high schools. For grades K-5, the five schools with the highest percentage of their students signed up for library cards received an assembly and twenty new books for their libraries. Four schools tied for first place, with 100 percent of their students and faculty signed up for library cards. For *Get Carded!* 10,000 students who already had or signed up for a Multnomah County Library card received a *KewlCard* that provided discounts from fourteen local merchants. These included one free bagel, one dollar off

a compact disc, 20 percent off book purchases, and two for the price of one at a local Internet cafe.

Nearly 16,000 students, teachers, future teachers, parents, and media specialists have attended or utilized at least one of over 300 School Corps presentations and customized services. Diane Wetzel, Title I coordinator at Alice Ott Middle School stated, "I'm so glad you have this service. Hopefully my students will begin to use the library. Many of them have never been there before." Particularly popular are the customized webliographies. "Everybody loves the webliographies; they have been especially appreciated by the teachers," comments Karen Gaddis-Philips, Sam Barlow High School's media specialist.

In summer 1998 team members presented science programs, technology training at libraries, schools, and community agencies, and a *Wild Wired Words* web camp at which disadvantaged youth created an illustrated story that they published on the Internet.

In August the School Corps sponsored three successful Educator Evenings. Teachers from K-12 public and private schools attended one of the three-hour programs, which included hands-on training in the Library's catalog, the article database, and web resources. This was a great opportunity to network with educators and to identify new outreach clientele. After attending these workshops, numerous educators contacted the program to schedule a School Corps librarian at a faculty meeting or for a class technology presentation. Especially significant, all program evaluations were returned. How were all returned? Teachers traded completed evaluation forms for coffee coupons. A great incentive! One educator stated, "[The School Corps Librarians] make me want to become a librarian!" The School Corps is currently working with Multnomah Education Service District to consider accreditation of future Educator Evenings as formal teacher continuing education credit opportunities.

The School Corps has also been nationally recognized, earning the title, "MCI Cybrarian of the Year" for Oregon in 1998. The team presented or will be presenting at numerous conferences: Oregon Library Association, Oregon Educational Media Association, New Mexico Library Association, PTA National Conference, and Online Northwest.

As the program's second year begins, the team will continue its outreach to community agencies, work on cooperative projects with youth librarians, offer Educator Evenings regularly, promote a kindergarten library card campaign, and extensively plan three one-week web day camps for the summers of 1999 and 2000.

For information about the Multnomah County Library School Corps, please contact Jackie Partch, (503) 736-6004, jacquelp@nethost.multnomah.lib.or.us

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As we move into the final phases of the Ten County Library District planning process we are finding mostly widespread support for the project. We all recognize the complexity of what we are trying to accomplish. As of the deadline for this article, there appears to be a consensus that a multi-year simulation of the most important planning elements may be the wisest. By “practicing” being a regional library system we could:

- Put as much of the regional service model components into place quickly while awaiting the proposed elections that would enable regional and/or other funding to come forward.
- Find out what these proposed services really would cost and if they will make a real difference to library services in the region.
- Test a model for the region that includes the major components of the models our consultants have recommended without having to choose “blindly” a model that we would have to live with.

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“BLAST OFF” WITH MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY’S A SCIENCE ODYSSEY PROGRAM

Multnomah County Library was the only Oregon location and one of 125 community organizations and individuals across the country selected as a site for A Science Odyssey, a national PBS outreach initiative coordinated by WGBH in Boston. The Library’s A Science Odyssey goal was to connect young people with science through library programs during spring and summer 1998.

Multnomah County Library created six science-theme programs to complement PBS’s A Science Odyssey television series, which aired on public broadcasting in winter 1998. These library programs included activities created by Youth Services and by WGBH and the Museum of Science in Boston. The programs, aimed at fourth through eighth graders, included the following:

- **Mountain Maker, Earth Shaker:** volcanoes, plate tectonics, rock collecting
- **The Unique You:** genetics, fingerprints, taste buds, eye and hair color
- **A Drop of Water:** surface tension, water molecules
- **Eye-Popping Illusions:** optical illusions, kaleidoscopes
- **Blast Off!:** gravity, constellations, the moon
- **Electric Attraction:** circuits, electricity, magnets, static

Upper elementary and middle school youth explored five or six hands-on activities for each program. Multnomah County Library promoted A Science Odyssey program to home schooling families.

- Adjust and refine the model that really works best for us as we learn from the test.
- Be prepared to give real data to our citizens who will eventually need to support legislation and ballot measures to establish a regional library system.
- Turn our energies toward “doing” services we think will better serve Eastern Oregonians, while continuing to hone the governance and structure of the system, incorporating our real experience being a region.
- Demonstrate to funding authorities the ability of our libraries, governing boards and citizens to collaborate in the best interests of serving Eastern Oregon residents.

All of us out here on the Eastern Oregon frontier say “Howdy pardner” and “Let’er buck!” on behalf of library cooperation in the 21st century. **Q**

The Library also sponsored a successful A Science Odyssey camp-in for 180 youth and parents in April 1998. This overnight program included interactive science activities and a presentation by the director of the Western Bigfoot Society. Numerous county citizens emailed and mailed the Library with thanks for these educational programs. One grateful parent wrote, “These programs were wonderful, hands-on science lessons for children. The topics were interesting, the instructor enthusiastic, and supporting materials were appropriate.”

Multnomah County Library School Corps continued to present A Science Odyssey throughout summer 1998 to culturally and economically diverse youth at summer schools, community centers, and Boys and Girls Clubs around the county. Overall, Youth Services provided more than seventy programs, reaching over 2000 county youth, ages nine to thirteen.

Patrons consistently requested that Multnomah County Library provide more hands-on learning programs in the future. As a result, the Library has planned “Hands-on-History,” a series of programs that explore different eras in world history, for fall 1998 and winter 1999.

A Science Odyssey is fun and had positive reactions from parents and youth. Here’s a great opportunity to present a program at your local library where all the planning has been done for you by WGBH and Multnomah County Library. Each program is most appropriate for grades four through eight and especially popular with home schooling families. **Q**

For information about A Science Odyssey programs, contact Kate Houston, Multnomah County Library (503) 736-6012, kateho@nethost.multnomah.lib.or.us