

Beyond the Walls

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Gary Public Library

Belief that a public library is the "People's University" has been a tenet of the Gary Public Library, Gary, Indiana, throughout its eighty year tradition. This belief doesn't rest there but goes on to see the library's mission as expanding horizons for its patrons.

The library's Children's Council, a management council composed of all children's librarians in the system, meets monthly to discuss, plan and execute system-wide programming. The Council has taken this people's university concept to heart and offers many programs and excursions outside the library walls designed to widen the interest and knowledge of youthful patrons and their families.

Library-sponsored Excursions

In this Year of the Young Reader it is timely to pause and reflect on how the Council encourages reading in conjunction with each enterprise it undertakes. Cultural trips for children and families are a unique feature of the children's programming. Such excursions grew out of the successful adult program aimed at Senior Citizen groups. At the insistence of the then President of the Board of Trustees,

bus trips for children were tried and found to be an appealing and successful venture.

For almost ten years the library, through the Council, has sponsored half-day, full day, and evening trips to such places as Chicago's DuSable Black History Museum, The Dunes National Lakeshore, Brookfield and Lincoln Park Zoos, the Indianapolis Children's Museum, Buckley Homestead, a working nineteenth century farm and park in Lowell, Indiana, special exhibits at the Museum of Science and Industry and other Chicago museums, trips to the Chicago area children's theaters and puppet theaters, and recently to *Where the Wild Things Are*, an opera adapted for the stage by Maurice Sendak.

Most of these offerings were preceded by programs on the same subject often prompting an explosion of non-fiction usage in the children's departments. For example, trips to the zoo were preceded by story hours and film showings on animals.

Each of these trips took planning of course; with each trip our expertise grew and the Council became more venturesome. An effort is made to

keep the cost within the reach of the family wallet. Bag lunches can be brought, and trips are scheduled on days when admission is free at zoos and museums. For some trips the only cost is bus fare.

Several considerations are taken into account when planning an excursion. For whom is the trip designed? What is the time frame? Are group rates possible? Is a guide available? Are there special programs offered on that day that may be available to the group?

A decision must also be made as to the age a child must be to travel by himself without an adult or parental supervision. Once all aspects of the trip are detailed, walked through and booked, permission slips must be printed and deadlines set for reservations.

Buses are booked at the same time the program is planned since the cost of the bus determines the net price of the trip. The Gary Public Library has found that school buses cost considerably less to rent than commercial buses, which helps hold down total costs. For both adults and children, capacity is about forty-five people per bus. If the trip is limited to children, a determination must be made as to how many chaperones will be needed.

Practical matters such as drawing up a list of those reserving seats, making name tags, and counting noses before departure and on the return trip are a must. Payment for the trip constitutes a reservation along with a signed permission slip for each person. Unseen by the public but very important, are the practical aspects dealing with insurance and money handling and the bookkeeping and accounting systems.

In a medium or large-size library system, a decision must be reached as to where the bus pick-up points will

be. Routes are usually determined by the bus company and/or drivers. Patrons should be informed on the permission slip of departure time at each unit and approximate time of the bus's return. It helps to have the slip detachable; the patron keeps the top while the library has bottom portion filled out by the patron for reference.

Publicity is an essential element; flyers, posters, newspaper articles, radio and/or TV spots are all necessary. Finally, before the date of the trip, check with the institution you are planning to visit and the bus company to verify arrangements and make sure all systems are GO!

If all the above scares you, that's not the intent. Most of these pointers fall under common sense. Others are provided to insure a worry free trip. The enthusiasm and long-term enjoyment of the participants makes every step involved well worth the effort.

We also wish to make the point that not every attempted trip is successful—we've had to cancel trips because not enough people signed up or weather conditions would prohibit an enjoyable time. In some cases, an alternate date was set.

Patrons have come to anticipate the excursions and some are regulars who help us count noses and chaperone. Community groups such as the Girl Scouts are frequent users. Often a whole troop accompanies us.

The Gary Public Library has had particular success with cultural trips to the Dunes National Lakeshore. Because the city of Gary meets certain federal guidelines, the Park Service is able to reimburse the library for the transportation cost through federal funding. Summer trips consisting of guided hikes through the many ecological terrains of the dunes as well as early spring trips to see maple sugaring are available. Snowshoeing

and cross-country skiing are offered in the winter for the more adventurous, and fall activities include the Harvest Festival. Thus educational and fun programs are available year-round.

Before taking any of these trips the library tries to feature book displays and work the subject into its craft programs and weekly movies as much as possible. Sometimes follow-up programs are used.

Special bus trips are sometimes offered as an incentive in the Summer Reading Program. During summer of 1988 a trip to see the dinosaurs was offered in "Dino-Soar to Better Reading." Those finishing went to the Field Museum of Natural History.

A Three-part Summer Reading Program

This summer will mark the third year a tri-part reading program has been offered. In an effort to deviate from the competition present in the traditional summer reading "games" and to involve the poorer reader in summer activities, the program offers:

- Recreational reading
- Tutoring in reading
- Arts and crafts

This innovative program offers an individually engraved trophy to each child who compiles a total of 250 points. Ten points are given for each book read on grade level; ten points are added for participation in every arts/crafts session; and five points for each tutoring session attended. Fifty points can be accumulated for the tutoring sessions as well as fifty points for the arts/crafts and activities. A record is kept in each child's booklet.

A child can earn all 250 points by reading on his own or by combining all or some of the parts to complete the program. Besides the awarding of individual trophies, the school having

the most students completing the program receives a large engraved trophy for its showcase. Presentation of the trophy is made in a special fall ceremony.

Months of advance planning are essential to system-wide programming of this sort. Planning for the 1988 "Dino-Soar to Better Reading" began in the previous year. Introduction of our own dinosaur was made in the spring when "Dino" accompanied children's librarians on class visits to the schools to promote the summer library activities.

A hand-crafted, specially made dinosaur costume of adjustable proportions was available to all units for this purpose. Just prior to the beginning of the Summer Reading Programs huge streetwide banners were erected in various parts of the city to advertise the program. Inflat-able five-foot dinosaurs were installed in each branch to publicize the summer reading activities and also served as progress charts. When each child reached 250 points, his name went on the spine and tail of the stegosaurus.

To insure that dinosaur materials would be available in quantity to the young patrons, a replacement list of both fiction and nonfiction titles and book/cassettes was generated, ordered and processed by June. This served a dual purpose; a change in textbooks in the school system meant that dinosaurs became a unit of study. Thus, we would be better prepared to meet additional requests for dinosaur books.

A centralized kick-off began the five week program and featured story-telling with some dinosaur stories by the Gary, Indiana Storytellers (GIST), a dinosaur puppet show, a dinosaur dance by "Dino," a massive balloon launch and refreshments. The mayor, city dignitaries and library board of

trustees were invited guests. The library director was on hand to help set up additional chairs, greet guests, and serve punch.

Additional publicity for the library and the reading program was gained by the library's entry in the city's 4th of July parade. A 30 foot long float highlighted "Dino" with children and librarians attired in dinosaur T-shirts. The children were selected from each branch's reading program.

The tutoring aspect of the program consisted of ten one-hour sessions. Volunteers were sought well ahead of time from civic groups, sororities, high schools and local colleges and universities. Volunteers were not paid but a head teacher for each branch was provided a stipend. All head teachers taught on the elementary level and prepared lesson plans together to provide a uniform curriculum for grades two through six. Parents were required to register their children for the tutoring portion in advance. They were asked to provide an assessment by their child's teacher of reading ability and skills needing improvement. This pre-knowledge aided considerably in running an effective tutoring program. The ratio of students to tutors was generally one tutor per three to five students, especially in grades two and three, the levels with most representation.

The Art and Crafts segment of the program is always popular. A local artist, usually an art teacher, is recruited to teach two crafts sessions for each unit. These are generally centered around the theme for that summer. For example, children made a three-dimensional paper drawing of a dinosaur and a clay dinosaur in 1988. The artist does receive a stipend.

Related activities such as dinosaur games and videos or films were used

to complement the theme. Dinosaur puppets, dinosaur magnetic board presentations, songs, raps, and activity sheets were all employed to provide a variety of ways to earn points. Incentives such as fast food coupons donated locally were given when each child reached one hundred points.

A special Awards Day is held to honor those who have completed the reading program at all library units. There, individually engraved trophies are presented. Publicity is timed so that the names of trophy winners appear in the weekly library news column of the local paper shortly thereafter.

Year Of The Young Reader Activities

Special activities scheduled to observe the "Year of the Young Reader" included a Children's Afro-American History Month program featuring Black folktales by GIST members and choral selections that are a part of the Black-American heritage by a local junior high choir. Winners of the systemwide contest "The Dream Lives On" were featured guests. Artwork appropriate to the month was displayed at the Main Library by the students of the performing arts high school.

Observation of Valentine's Day found Gary's children writing Valentine letters to a famous Black personality they admired. The letters were mailed to the celebrities by the library in bulk mailings. A cover letter requested from each personality either a return letter or an autographed picture and a sentence telling of their favorite book.

Additional library promotions for the "Year of the Young Reader" include Parent Open House during National Library Week. Each unit

will invite neighborhood families. The Open House will feature a display of new children's materials, booklists and promotional flyers for this summer's reading program "Blast Off to Reading" plus refreshments.

That week children will also have the opportunity to design a poster for Children's Book Week in a city-wide contest. The winning posters will then be reproduced for use throughout Gary Public Library and the city during National Children's Book Week. When November arrives, so will a special author and/or artist to help celebrate Children's Book Week. Hopefully contest winners will have an opportunity to breakfast with the author and ask questions in this congenial atmosphere. Winners will also serve as hosts and hostesses at the public presentation. Plans for the remainder of the "Year of the Young Reader" include assembling packets for the local hospitals to send home

with newborns and their mothers on the importance of reading.

Santa Claus always visits Gary's children in our libraries during the holiday season. Because Santa's appearance has been so successful, this year the Children's Council presented the Easter Bunny. Arrangements were made for his visits to all branches and pictures with the children were be taken for a nominal fee if the parent so desired.

The Gary Public Library is proud of its programming for children. The belief that "Tomorrow's Leaders Are Today's Readers" permeates our staff. Ideas from throughout the staff ignite the council's planning. From the director's active support to maintenance's cooperation, from a clerk offering her talent to a patron agreeing to display a hobby, the Children's Council is finding many varied ways to make every year the "Year of the Young Reader."