

# NEWS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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### **Diversity Forum Brings Librarians Together: Comprehensive Community Outreach Programs Are Proposed**

The many dimensions of diversity in East Central Illinois, and their impact on library services, were the subject of a two-day forum for librarians held at the Holiday Inn in Urbana on Thursday, April 21, and Friday, April 22, 2005.

Demographic information compiled by Lincoln Trail Libraries System (LTLS) shows that between 1990 and 2000 the Latino population of East Central Illinois increased by 69%, while the Asian population increased by 40% over the same period. These trends continue, and are paralleled in other ethnic and cultural groups. By the year 2050, U.S. Census projections indicate that "minority" groups will become a majority in the United States, as they already have in California.

LTLS organized "Diversity Forum 2005: Developing a Cooperative Vision for Services to Diverse Populations" to allow local librarians to pool their knowledge and resources on diversity-related issues. Guest speakers such as Yolanda Cuesta of Sacramento, California, were invited to share insights with Forum participants. Cuesta, former Ethnic Services Consultant at the California State Library, spoke on how the demographic changes now occurring in East Central Illinois mirror those that took place in California a generation ago. Cuesta stressed that outreach efforts must begin early and must begin with person-to-person contact between librarians and members of the target population.

Satia Marshall Orange, Director of the Office of Literacy and Outreach Services at the American Library Association in Chicago, emphasized that diversity is about much more than race and ethnicity, encompassing factors such as age, disability, economic level, culture, and language. Orange also spoke and led a workshop on how libraries can develop and sustain outreach efforts to "under-served" populations in their communities.

It was decided by Forum participants to form a Diversity Team to carry forward the work begun at the Forum. \$20,000 of the LSTA grant funds have been reserved to serve as seed money for collaborative projects to be launched in the near future.

"I think this Forum was a great opportunity to bring librarians together from all over our system and beyond," said Jan Ison, Director of LTLS. "These issues affect us all, and they should be dealt with in a cooperative fashion."

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Participants also heard from representatives of East Central Illinois' Hispanic/Latino, African-American, African, Asian, and Native American communities, and were treated to a drum-and-dance performance entitled "Afrika to America: The Beat Goes On" by Champaign resident Amira M. Davis, Director of the Afrikan-American Cultural Arts Program, and her three daughters.

The Forum was attended by Kathy Wicks, Head of Circulation at the Urbana Free Library; Sarah Dutelle, Children's Librarian at the Douglass Branch of the Champaign Public Library; Rae-Anne Montague of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois; Bernice Harrington of the Human Resources Department at the University of Illinois Library; Dana Wright, Diversity Services Librarian at the University of Illinois Undergraduate Library; Lenita Epinger of the Parkland College Business Development Center; Sandra Ahten of the Urbana-Champaign Books to Prisoners Project; Holly Thompson, Director of the Rantoul Public Library; Carolyn Adkins, Librarian at Tuscola School District #301; Edie Floyd, Library Director at Arcola Community Unit School District #306; Jantha Rollings of the Arcola Public Library District; Lou Graham, Director of the Hoopeston Public Library; Anne Newman, Director of the Paxton Carnegie Library; other library directors and staff from Effingham, Charleston, Marshall, Clifton, Gilman, and Onarga; LTLS consultants Amy Weber, Pat Boze, Donna Schaal, Joe Sciacca, and Kit Condill; LTLS Director Jan Ison; and by Vandella Brown, Manager of the Diversity Office of the Illinois State Library.

The Diversity Forum was made possible by a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant awarded by the Illinois State Library, a division of the office of Jesse White, Secretary of State and State Librarian. Lincoln Trail Libraries System secured this grant, entitled "Diversity and Cultural Competency in Rural Libraries," with letters of support from area libraries, and in response to a growing need to reach out to under-served communities, both new and old.

Founded in 1966, Lincoln Trail Libraries System has headquarters in Champaign and is one of 9 multitype library systems in the State of Illinois. The System serves 7 academic, 53 public, 47 school, and 17 special libraries in Champaign, Clark, Coles, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Iroquois, Piatt, and Vermilion counties. Lincoln Trail advocates, collaborates, and facilitates education and cooperation to empower information agencies to improve and expand access to and delivery of information resources.

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