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Some Examples of Oregon Libraries' Responses to September 11

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Librarianship is a profession, not a place. Just as there are physicians who do not work in hospitals, and attorneys who never set foot in a courtroom, so too are librarians more than people who work in libraries. It's important that we keep the definition of our profession in mind when we think about the ways that Oregon librarians responded to the crisis of September 11.

The tragedy of September 11 offered all of us an opportunity to go to the forefront of our communities, demonstrating our special knowledge of locating and making accessible critical information needed by a clientele in crisis.



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Any librarian whose professional work was not affected by September 11 must seriously examine their commitment to the profession. If they cannot point to something they did, or to some basic professional tenet they re-examined, or some way their work was changed in response to September 11, then they are just slouching toward retirement. We will (hopefully) not face a crisis as great again in our lives, but we can assess the ways that we as professionals responded to the crisis.

James Russell Lowell wrote, "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide" Amplifying that idea, Albert Camus wrote, "Not to decide is to decide." We have all made our decisions about September 11; here are some examples of

service decisions made by Oregon librarians. Notice the breadth of actions—by type of library, by medium of response, and by community served. This will serve as an incomplete but still impressive testimonial to the responsiveness of Oregon librarians to their communities' needs.

THE MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY (<http://www.multcolib.org>) created Web pages that were an early and comprehensive source for information. Staff designed pages of links to sources for news, contributions to charities, and background information about Afghanistan and related topics. Over a year later, in October 2002, Multnomah County Library staff maintain a site, Beyond September 11, that includes links to Library holdings as well as URLs to other information sites (<http://www.multcolib.org/ref/headlines.html>). Multnomah's ongoing work demonstrates that an information need can be ongoing in a community, and librarians' responses must remain up-to-date in dealing with those needs.

The Beaverton City Library (<http://www.ci.beaverton.or.us/departments/library/default.asp>) recognized potential local economic effects of September 11. Jill Adams, Business Reference Librarian, reported that her library began coordinating a series of business information programs to provide an expert and detailed look at the Oregon economy. This resulted in a 7-part series of programs throughout the Fall and into the Winter of 2001, bringing in experts such as Joseph Cortright, John Mitchell, and Gerry Mildner. The speakers highlighted the economic effects on Washington County in several sessions.

The Tigard Public Library (<http://www.ci.tigard.or.us/library/default.asp>) assembled a display of books on terrorism (a book on Osama bin-Laden was already in the collection), according to Tony Greiner and Adult Services Librarian Kate Miller. The





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Library also displayed books on Islam, civil liberties issues, patriotism and related issues, and the Children's Department prepared a display on talking to children about grief and loss. Shortly after September 11, David Stabler, music critic for the *Oregonian*, published a list

of classic recordings that were particularly soothing. The Tigard Public Library copied that list, noted the call numbers of items that were in its holdings, and posted a copy near their music section. Kate Miller wrote, "As the anniversary rolled around, I started thinking about the fact that since the book group meeting day had changed from Tuesday to Wednesday, our September meeting would, once again, fall on the eleventh. I decided to

choose a book that would commemorate those events." Therefore, for its September 11, 2002 meeting, the Library-sponsored book club read *Writing in the Dust: After September 11*, by Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The evening program included a discussion of the book and a viewing of the first half of the documentary that aired on Frontline called *Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero*.

September 11 focused public attention on public safety workers, highlighting the heroic sacrifices of police and firefighters. In Salem, the **Oregon Occupational and Health Administration (OR-OSHA) Resource Center & Video Library** (<http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/osha/standards/avlibad.htm>) naturally received an increased demand for safety and health information. Don Harris, AV Librarian, reported that the Center acquired five additional training videos: 1) *Anthrax Awareness*; 2) *Emergency Action Plan: Crisis Under Control*; 3) *Rapid Intervention Teams*; 4) *Facility Security*; and 5) *Biological and Chemical Threats: Closing the Door*. As Don points out, "These videos, like our other holdings, are available for loan to any

employer or worker in the state of Oregon. Return shipping is the only charge involved. Use of the five titles listed above has been fairly consistent throughout the last year.

Arlene Cohen, Northwest LINK Reference Librarian at **Oregon State University** (<http://osulibrary.orst.edu/linkweb/>), reported that she added URLs to the Northwest LINK Reference Referral Center's home page, directing patrons to needed information sources providing crisis support information (<http://osulibrary.orst.edu/linkweb/patron.htm>). Many of these linked resources were prepared by staff of the Multnomah County Library.

At the Ashland Branch of the **Jackson County Library System** (<http://jcls.org/ashland.html>), Amy Kinard reported two actions by library staff. First, Web sites were posted on the Reference Area White Board to assist reference librarians answering questions. These Web sites included such information as rosters of victims, blood donation needs, ways to talk with children, and current news sites. Second, the library created displays of circulating books on two topics: grief and feelings, and world religions (including Islam).

Bonnie Hirsh, Adult Services Librarian, summarized activities at the **Eugene Public Library** (<http://www.ci.eugene.or.us/library/>):

First we turned on the TV in the lecture room, so public and staff could follow the news (during that first week). We added links to relevant Web sites to our Web page, we added a September 11 subject heading to the catalog, and put together a bibliography and display. Finally, we updated the book collection (new Islamic art books, for instance).

Eugene citizens were outraged when the local Islamic Cultural Center's building was vandalized with hate messages shortly after September 11. Eugeneans responded with vigils, symposia, demonstrations, and requests for more information. At the Eugene Library a bibliography and display



of materials about Islam and the Middle East were quickly created. The materials were not limited to political and religious information, but also included arts and cultures. The Library presented a panel discussion late in October entitled *Keep the Dialog Going: Perspectives on Islamic Culture and History*. The speakers included the head of Eugene's Islamic Cultural Center, his wife, an American who converted to Islam, a Muslim couple who are graduate students from China, another student couple from Indonesia, and a university professor who had lived and studied in Iran.

The common perception of repressed womanhood was refuted by the thoughtful presentations of the women on the panel. One woman was a fluent translator for her husband who had limited English skills. Replying to a question from the audience, she pointed out that she was here, not as a refugee or immigrant, but as a university graduate student. Another woman said, "It would endanger my life to wear (the head scarf) at home. I am glad to have the freedom to wear it in this country." The American woman explained how a "white bread mid-westerner" converted to Islam.

While precautions had been taken to deal with any disruptive elements, the audience remained respectful, thoughtful, and eager to learn more in order to live in peace with their neighbors.

The Douglas County Library System (<http://www.co.douglas.or.us/library>) responded to September 11 by increasing access to materials already in its catalog. When the System converted its automation system to DRA in the early 1990s, some older works in the collection did not get full cataloging records. Fred Reenstjerna, Cataloging Librarian, identified materials such as James Michener's *Caravans* that were related to Afghanistan but lacked full subject access. Since the Library System lacked an extensive collection of books on specific countries in the region, he also added geographical tracings for volumes of *Countries of the World* and related series

that contained significant information about Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Afghanistan.

As the previous issue of *OLAQ* pointed out, children are people, too—and September 11's effects were as critical to this part of our service community as to the adult sector. Cheryl Weems, Children's Librarian at the **Bend Public Library** (<http://dpls.lib.or.us/>), reported on special efforts to get information to children and to their parents:

1. On the (Bend Public Library's) children's Web page we had links to a bunch of sites from ALA to the American Academy of Pediatrics which were targeted towards helping children through the crisis;
2. We went through our collection on subjects ranging from grief to Islam to tolerance and used many bibliographies that came out on PubYac, ALA, etc., to beef up the collection;
3. We participated in the Brooklyn Public Library-sponsored "children writing to children" by providing paper and writing materials, and then mailing the letters once they were all collected;
4. At the time, we were working on a small donation through the local hospice to complement our collection on books dealing with grief; we created a bibliography of these titles.

By working to meet the information needs of one segment of their community, the Bend Public Library was already equipped to meet an unexpected information need.

Oregon libraries continued to meet the needs of their communities as the anniversary of September 11 approached. In Klamath Falls, the **Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT)** (<http://www.oit.edu/>) *See Libraries' Responses page 24*

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Libraries' Responses

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lbrary) received donations of materials from the local Islamic and Jewish communities for the Library's collection during 2001 and 2002. Working with these community groups, OIT sponsored a speakers' series in the Fall of 2002, according to Marita Kunkel, Director of the Library.

In April 2002, the **Newport Public Library** sponsored a program by Afghan-American photographer Ibrahim Wahab, reported Reference Coordinator Sheryl Etheridge. Entitled *Where is Afghanistan?*, the program documented Wahab's recent two-month visit to his homeland. Sheryl observed, "Many people spoke up and asked what they personally could do to help. They came to the program to learn about Afghanistan, and left with a fresh, new perspective."

The Rev. Peter Marshall wrote, "Life is measured not by its duration but by its donation." The quality of our professional life is indeed measured by the donation

that we make to our clients of our unique professional skills. We must not think that our response in any library was unimportant or insignificant: all of us who thought about the nature of our work and the needs of our clients, and who used the resources we had to meet those needs—all of us were responding to the sudden and special crisis in our communities. And I use the term "community" deliberately to mean those people whom we serve, regardless of the type of library we work in. Academic and special libraries have communities of users, just as public and school libraries have communities.

The examples described in these pages are only a partial demonstration of the response of Oregon libraries. They are, however, exemplary in their scope and initiative. When we look back on the effects of September 11, we can be proud of the responses that Oregon librarians made to this historic crisis. 

Library Life in the Shadow

Continued from page 12

The American Library Association's Washington Office has brought together valuable "best practices" in its Web site on privacy, and frequently sponsors programs at conferences addressing these issues. The ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom has prepared numerous statements and guidelines over the years that can be incorporated into our plans. As libraries we are accustomed to sharing resources and this is an opportune time to do so.

Threats to the values of library service in a democracy have always been present. But in this climate, when everyone has experienced the fear of terrorism, there is more sympathy for the threats to become reality in our libraries. Sympathy for restricting privacy, confidentiality and

intellectual freedom lies not just within our communities but also among our administrators; perhaps even among ourselves.

The USA PATRIOT Act, an acronym that stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism, passed in 2001 and is in place. This is a time to be mindful of our values, our policies and the law. This is a time to establish the parameters of how far we each are willing to go to protect the intellectual freedom of library users on the one hand, and to protect our communities on the other. 

The ALA Washington Office URL is: www.ala.org/washoff/patriot.html

